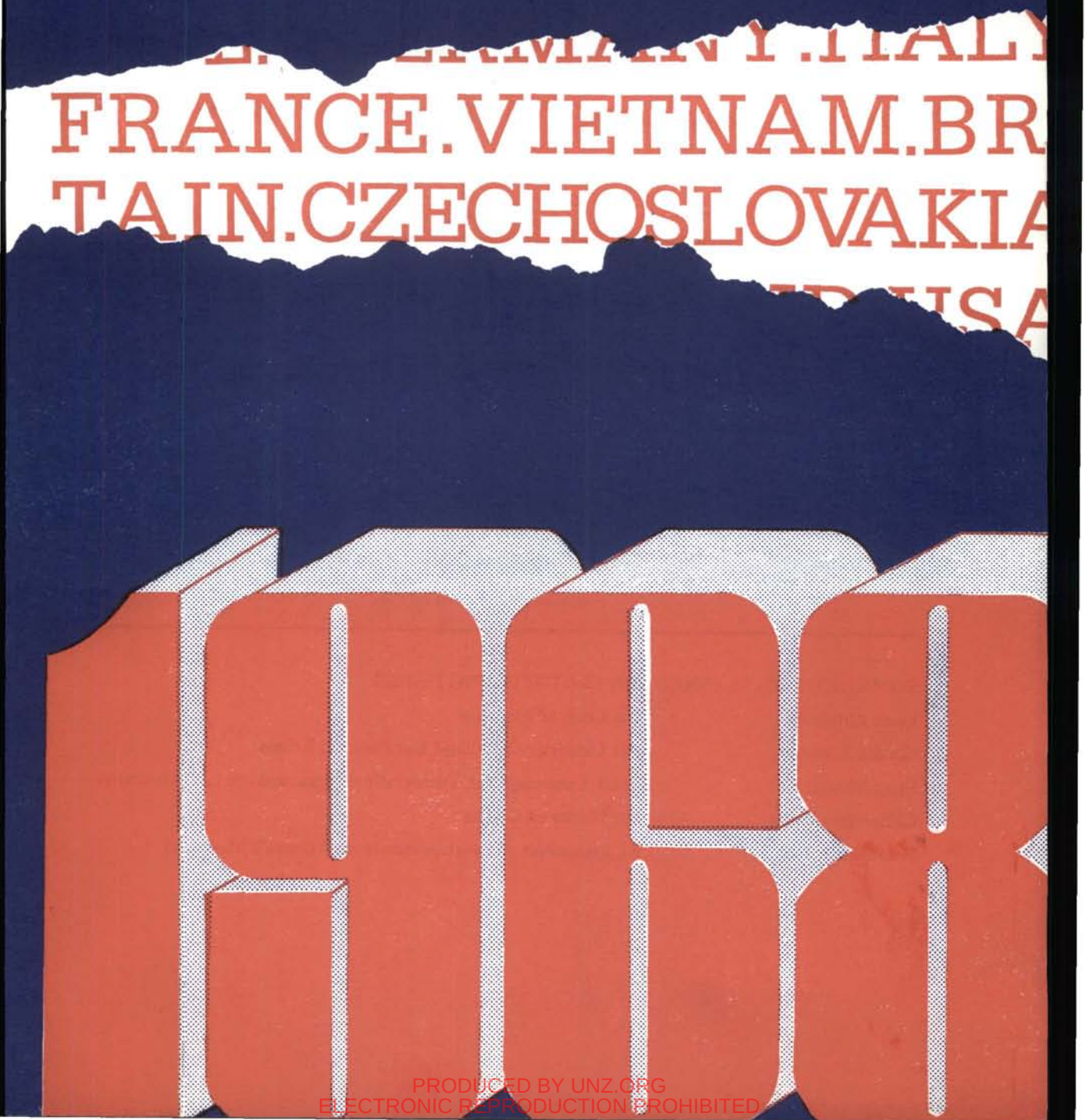
Marxism Today

Theoretical and Discussion Journal of the Communist Party

May 1978 35 pence



PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Marxism Today

Theoretical and Discussion Journal of the Communist Party

Volume 22, Number 5

Editor Martin Jacques

Editorial Board

Irene Brennan/Gabriel Carritt
Jack Cohen/John Foster/Alan Hunt
Arnold Kettle/Betty Matthews
Bert Pearce/Dave Priscott
Mike Seifert/Sue Slipman
George Wake/Nick Wright/Dave Wynn

Editorial Correspondence
Martin Jacques, 16 King Street, WC2E 8HY

Advertisements
Doris Allison, above address

Orders and Subscriptions
Usual Agents or Central Books Ltd., 37 Grays Inn Road, London WC1X 8PS

Subscription Rates
£4.50 per annum UK and Eire
£5.25 per annum Abroad

CONTENTS

	Editorial Comments	129
Eric Hobsbawm	**1968—A Retrospect**	130
Interview:		
Jean Elleinstein	**Events of May-June 1968 in France**	139
Liz Hodgkin	**People's War Comes to the Towns: Tet 1968**	147
Jon Bloomfield	**The "Prague Spring" Re-assessed**	154
David Triesman	**Cultural Conflict and Political Advance in Britain**	162

Cover designed by David Treisman

SOME ARTICLES PLANNED FOR FORTHCOMING ISSUES

Louis Althusser	**The Crisis of Marxism**
Gordon Robinson	**The Character of Ruling-Class Power in Britain**
Steve Munby	**Youth Unemployment, Democratic Struggle and the Left Alternative**
Gideon Ben-Tovim	**The Nature of Racism**
Frankie Rickford	**An Assessment of Developments in the Women's Movement**

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Editorial Comments

The Tet Offensive in Vietnam, the May Events in France, the "Prague Spring" in Czechoslovakia (together with the subsequent Soviet intervention), the wave of student unrest which erupted in many countries—these are some of the events by which we remember 1968.

By any standards, 1968 was an extraordinary year. It witnessed a new climax in what—in retrospect—was one of the most important national liberation struggles this century. It marked, without much doubt, the most significant year in the evolution of the socialist world since 1956. And, perhaps above all, it proved something of a turning-point in the post-war development of Western Europe.

For 1968 marked the end of the long boom and relative social stability which had characterised post-war capitalism. Over nine million workers struck in France in what was one of the biggest demonstrations of working-class action and solidarity ever. It was followed, in 1969, by a similar, if rather more protracted, wave of action in the Italian "hot autumn". The myth of working-class "incorporation", which had infected southern as well as northern Europe, was shattered.

At the same time, new strata emerged into struggle on a scale previously unknown and even less anticipated. A major rupture opened up between students, intellectuals, the middle sections, and the ruling establishments—not only in France and Italy, but also in Britain, West Germany, even the United States. This rupture unleashed a whole set of new forces: it posed new problems and possibilities for the left. It is fair to say that, a decade on, we are still trying to come to terms with the meaning of these forces and their implications.

1968 was essentially a year of movement—it marked the entry—and re-entry—into action of millions and millions of people, certainly in the capitalist world, but also well beyond. Such moments in history are comparatively rare—and their consequences are usually enormous and frequently protracted. Indeed, in general we can say that we are still seeking to understand what 1968 meant, what it helped to unleash. This issue of *Marxism Today* is a contribution to that process.

It opens with an article by Eric Hobsbawm, leading Communist historian and political writer, in which he surveys the general landscape of 1968 and draws certain conclusions. This is followed by a number of articles which look at specific aspects of 1968. There is an interview with Jean Elleinstein, Communist parliamentary candidate in France and author of *The Stalin Phenomenon*, on the May-June Events in France. Liz Hodgkin, who teaches in Birmingham and has spent several years in Vietnam, writes on an event which inspired a generation throughout the world—the Tet Offensive in Vietnam. This is followed by an article on the "Prague Spring" in Czechoslovakia by Jon Bloomfield, who has researched on that country and is now the Birmingham City Secretary of the Communist Party. Finally, David Triesman, now a lecturer and in 1968 a student militant, looks at aspects of that year in Britain.

From this issue—and these articles—it is clear that 1968 presents a rich but complex picture. Many of the questions it threw up remain "living" questions for us ten years on. They are the subject of ongoing discussion. We hope this issue will stimulate further discussion and thought on a year which marked something of a landmark in post-war history.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

1968—A Retrospect

Eric Hobsbawm

History does not usually suit the convenience of people who like to divide it into neat periods, but there are times when it seems to have pity on them. The year 1968 almost looks as though it had been designed to serve as some sort of signpost. There is hardly any region of the world in which it is not marked by spectacular and dramatic events which were to have profound repercussions on the history of the country in which they occurred and, as often as not, globally. This is true of the developed and industrialised capitalist countries, of the socialist world, and of the so-called "third world"; of both the eastern and western, the northern and southern hemispheres. Looking back on this memorable year ten years later, does it help us to see the history of our own times in perspective? It is worth trying to make the attempt.

A Survey

Of course, in making such a survey, we must not become the prisoners either of chronology or of the front-page headlines; that is to say, we must avoid thinking exclusively in terms of those startling, unexpected, dramatic or traumatic events which were so typical of 1968. There were plenty of those. It began with the Tet offensive of the Vietnamese which, as we can now see, broke the determination of the USA and made its defeat in Vietnam certain. It led almost immediately to President Johnson's decision not to stand for re-election and therefore to the election of Nixon in the same year. The year continued with the resignation of President Novotny in Czechoslovakia, followed by the "Prague Spring" and eventually—on August 20-1—the invasion of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic by the USSR. Spring was also a season of crisis in France. The so-called "events of May" were not merely the largest student mobilisation leading to (probably) the largest workers' general strike in French history. Whether or not they could have turned into the first peacetime revolution in western Europe since Spain in 1936 is still debated. Probably not. However, the retirement of General de Gaulle a year later was certainly the direct, if delayed, consequence of May 1968; and so, probably, was the reunion of the left under its "common programme" in the early 1970s. Student demonstrations were also notable in Poland and Yugoslavia. In the autumn the drama shifted to the western hemisphere. The massacre of students and others at a great public meeting in Mexico shortly before the Olympic Games (30-40 dead were officially admitted) was the culmination of a major student and popular agitation in that country. Though it was immediately met by ruthless repression, it is significant that Mexican policy moved distinctly to the left under the next president (who had been responsible for the repression as Minister of the Interior).

Another unexpected development in Latin America was the appearance of progressive anti-imperialist military coups. The one in Panama was to lead to a sharp confrontation with the USA which still continues. The more important one in Peru was to lead to the most drastic agrarian reform ever undertaken by any non-revolutionary regime on that continent. Finally, returning to Europe—again in the autumn of 1968—we see the start of the present phase of the struggle in Northern Ireland with the clash between police and civil rights demonstrators in Londonderry. Meanwhile, in Western Germany the attempted assassination of Rudi Dutschke initiated the phase of massive student agitation in that country, while in Italy the combination of student demonstrations and riots with a 24-hour general strike, already announced the great movement which reached its peak in the "hot autumn" of 1969.

These were dramatic enough events, even without those which made the headlines but probably had less far-reaching consequences, such as the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Sen. Robert Kennedy in the USA, and those which were of great importance in particular countries without affecting the rest of the world much, such as the winning of independence by South Yemen, Mauritius and Swaziland and some military coups in Africa. However, it is unwise to forget at least four developments which cannot be so easily identified with any particular dates in 1968, but went on throughout the year. The first of these was the Chinese Cultural Revolution which was then at its peak. The second—as always—was the continued conflict in the Middle East. Here, after the Israeli victory of 1967, terrorist action by Palestinian commandos increasingly played a highly visible part, as did counter-terrorism by the Israelis. The third was the tragic civil war in Nigeria, dragging on the inevitable defeat of Biafra. Finally, and more directly to our point, there were the symptoms of breakdown in the international framework within which the great

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

capitalist boom of the 1950s and 1960s had operated. These symptoms were noted at the time in *Marxism Today* and seem even more significant in retrospect.

These events fall into three groups. First, there were those which expressed the general contradictions which had developed in the capitalist world (including its "third world" dependencies) in the course of two decades of record-breaking economic expansion. Second, there were those which, more specifically, reflected the main type of struggle which had continued throughout the long boom period, namely the anti-imperialist liberation struggle in the non-European world. Finally, there were those which reflected the internal problems of development within the socialist sector of the world. May 1968 in France was a striking and unpredicted example of the first, Vietnam an obvious example of the second, and Czechoslovakia of the third.

I THE CAPITALIST WORLD

In the capitalist world there had never been a period of expansion and prosperity to compare with the 1950s and 1960s. All the developed industrial countries shared in it, even Britain whose capitalist economy was notoriously unable to overcome its problems; and so, to a smaller extent, did most of the less developed countries. Even the fluctuations of the world economy such as the trade cycle of boom and slump were so mild as to make Keynesian economists (mistakenly) confident that real depression could never recur. Governments had learned how to prevent it. If ever capitalism looked as though it worked, it was in these decades. For, apart from dramatic technological progress and handsome profits, they brought strikingly impressive improvements in the standards of living of most of their inhabitants, due partly to rising wages and high employment, partly to great improvements in social security in many capitalist countries, partly to the enormous transformation of life by what one might call "technology for everyday consumption"—from detergents and plastic bags to transistors and TV. As conservative election propaganda put it: "You've never had it so good." That there was plenty of room for improvement did not alter the evident fact that in material terms the lives of most ordinary people in the capitalist countries were undergoing a remarkable transformation for the better.

A Stable Framework

From the point of view of capitalism, the conditions were indeed unusually favourable. Under the hegemony of the USA, which emerged from World War II as the unquestioned lord of the capitalist world, both economically and in military terms, a reasonably stable international economic framework had been constructed. It was a system of relatively free international trade and payments, based on the strength of the dollar and of institutions of international finance dominated by the USA. This greatly facilitated the economic expansion of the developed countries, and furthermore, for reasons of anti-communism, the USA gave substantial help and encouragement to the recovery of other capitalist countries and fostered the formation of larger regional groups among them. As it happened, the major multinational corporations which now increasingly dominated the global capitalist economy, were based in the USA, and therefore benefited from development everywhere else. Politically, the governments of virtually all capitalist countries were solidly conservative, and indeed often for long periods under parties or rulers with what looked like permanent or unshakeable majorities (like the Christian Democrats in West Germany and Italy, the so-called Liberal Democrats in Japan, the Gaullists in France). Except in Scandinavia and possibly Britain, even the Social Democrats looked merely like permanent oppositions which might just occasionally scrape into government with hair-breadth majorities or as parts of coalitions. The only fly in the ointment was that, where Communist parties had achieved mass support as in France and Italy, they managed—to the surprise and disappointment of the conservative forces—to maintain their mass support among the working classes. For the workers recognised that what benefits they had obtained—and they were substantial—rested largely on their strength and their struggles. On the other hand, a combination of right-wing labour leaders and the US government (with suitable interventions by such bodies as the CIA) had succeeded in splitting the international and many national trade union movements in the years after the war, thus severely weakening some of them, especially in many third-world countries. Success in splitting left-wing socialist parties (as in Italy and Japan) was less, but not negligible.

Capitalism and its ideologists therefore looked upon the world with considerable complacency. Economic growth was unparalleled, though less dramatic, in percentage terms, in some countries than in others. It seemed to eliminate the hope that the socialist world would outproduce the capitalist world in peaceful competition, and the realisation that capitalism appeared to be, economically and technologically, pulling ahead, was one of the factors in the internal difficulties of the socialist world. Depression seemed to be under control. A combination of large corporations working together with a growing state sector—

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

state monopoly capitalism—introduced an element of planning and seemed to provide a more permanently viable base for a neo-liberal capitalism than free market competition. The "end of ideology" (i.e. of revolutionary ideology) was proclaimed. The birth of "post-industrial society"—i.e. a capitalism freed by technology and its technocrats from its ancient contradictions—was announced.

Economic Problems

Yet even at the height of the great boom there were signs of economic troubles, notably in the weaker capitalist countries such as Britain and Italy. Internationally, the boom meant inflation—and inflation at different rates. The official economists did not know what to do about it. The gold-based dollar, on which the international payments system rested, was under increasing strain, both for this reason and because the USA, though the giant of the economic world, was increasingly a less efficient (i.e. cheap) producer than more modernised economies—e.g. Germany and Japan, and furthermore, unlike these, spent an enormous amount on maintaining its military hegemony by wars and armaments expenditure. The USA thus developed a very large deficit with the rest of the world, and its vast hoard of gold began to melt away. In fact, though the crisis of the dollar did not reach flash-point until 1971, the international payments system was already visibly shaky in 1968, following devaluation of the pound sterling in late 1967.

However, though this mini-crisis of the dollar in 1968 was a sort of trailer for the later global capitalist depression, it was not the economic but the social contradictions of the great boom which burst into the open in 1968. And they did so in a manner so sudden and unpredictable (as in France in 1968) just because the tensions which had accumulated in the course of the 1950s and 1960s were so great, though masked to some extent by economic improvement, and because the uneasiness about what was happening to the social fabric was so pervasive. Almost anything might have sparked off the outburst, though it was no accident that the spark came from the students.

Transformations

It is not possible here to survey the extraordinary and massive transformations in the capitalist societies during these decades, though some of them were visible enough in the form of cities rebuilt, in the explosion of higher education (the number of West German students trebled between 1960 and 1968, mostly the first generation of their families ever to have studied), or in the torrent of countrymen—notably from backward regions and countries—pouring into the cities and shanty-towns of the globe and the factories of the industrial world. It is enough to note that the techno-scientific revolution, the triumph of a consumer society which made old expectations obsolete, which eroded the acceptance of old privileges by the non-privileged, and which caused old conventions and ways of life to crumble, affected most classes and strata of the peoples. Some of these tensions were indeed economic. Workers discovered that a living standard previously confined to their "superiors" was now within their reach, that they had as much right to it as anyone else, and that, in spite of improvement, they could get more. The workers and sub-proletarians on the margins of the great boom—people like the blacks in the USA—were increasingly aware of their disadvantage.

Growing Strains

Yet the major strains were not purely economic, as witness the fact that the fashionable critique of society among the dissidents and rebels of the industrial countries ceased for a while to be economic, and became sociological. Its key terms were not poverty or exploitation or even crisis, but "alienation", "bureaucratisation", manipulation", etc. And within the labour movement itself demands which had long been marginal or forgotten moved into the foreground: "workers' control", "participatory democracy". These were protests against an economy of affluence which grew at the expense of social relations, which moved people by remote control, gave them material goods while it took away their power to shape their lives.

These symptoms of crisis were first clearly visible in culture and more especially (though much less in Europe than in the USA) in the culture of the young, who had in these decades become an economically autonomous group. The working class base of this culture was not seriously politicised; it merely expressed, like the early American and even more British rock-music, a decline in middle class cultural hegemony, a vague rebellion of young workers against the older generation—and their own ability to buy. The political element entered this "cultural revolution" chiefly when it was taken up by a specific stratum: the children of the affluent middle class who became aware that affluence itself was not enough for those who had enough of it (most of the world was far from this point), and the growing number of young recruits to the professional and white-collar strata whom the new bureaucratised and technified state-monopoly capitalism required in unprecedented numbers. Both found a centre and a focus in the rapidly expanding universities, with

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

or without their attendant drop-out communities. This phenomenon was particularly clearly seen in what became both the first global nucleus of mass student activism in the industrialised world, and the centre of a counter-culture which saw itself as social rebellion, the Bay Area around San Francisco between 1960 and 1967.

The Significance of this Rebellion

To state that the heart of this rebellion was in sectors of middle class youth is not to diminish it. Nor is it a criticism to claim that this revolt acquired a mass basis among students because this stratum faced specific and concrete problems as a group which were of little interest to anyone else. The important thing to note is that this rebellion became a movement of the political left, appealing (however confusedly) to Marx as a symbol of the revolutionary transformation of society. This was especially so in countries with a strong labour tradition, but even where there was none in the universities (as in West Germany and the USA) links with revolutionary-socialist ideas were established. The student generation of the late 1960s became the first in the history of the developed capitalist countries to turn to the left en masse; at all events the first since the generation of 1848, with which it has some similarities. It did so for several reasons. Some students could, by virtue of their favoured position, see some essential weaknesses of the society of the great boom more clearly than other groups more directly involved in, and materially benefiting from, it. All of them faced a direct contradiction between what the universities taught them and the careers as the cadres of the new bureaucratic consumer capitalism for which they were destined: its managers, technicians, bureaucrats, media propagandists and teachers. In most countries they confronted conservative regimes ossified by long and exclusive control of power, and in the USA the specific hazard of conscription in a reactionary, appalling and unpopular war. Prosperity gave them unusual freedom at this time, since getting a living did not look like a problem. They had (unlike most people in production) a great deal of time they could devote to politics. And they were young enough to carry their belief in the necessity of revolt into action.

No Organic Link

There was, however, no organic link in the industrially developed countries between this new student and intellectual left and the working class movement; especially as many of the rebels rejected the actually existing mass labour movements as insufficiently revolutionary. Where social tensions within the working class had also been building up, which had found no immediate means of expression, the student movement provided the spark for the explosion of mass strike movements. This was the case in France and Italy, but by no means everywhere. The movements typified by May 1968 in France were the proof that capitalism had not overcome its contradictions and demonstrated the political vulnerability of the regimes of the 1950s and 1960s. They announced a new period of struggles and political alignments, but they did not initiate revolutionary upheavals.

II THE ANTI-IMPERIALIST STRUGGLES

While the struggle in the industrially developed countries of capitalism had stagnated in the 1950s and 1960s, the great movement of colonial and semi-colonial liberation had continued, even though the old imperial powers sometimes (as in large parts of Africa) tried to short-circuit it by wholesale "de-colonisation", which made former dependencies into formally independent neo-colonial states. Since these struggles were by definition anti-imperialist, they directly involved the central imperialist power, the USA, both as the locally dominant exploiter (as in Latin America) and because liberation anywhere was regarded as threatening the total military and political dominance of the USA (with its dependent allies) over the entire globe not actually accepted as belonging to the peoples' democratic and socialist sector at the end of World War II, and, after 1949, China. Hence the USA had committed its standing as the ruler of the capitalist world to its success in the struggle against any liberation movement which threatened to escape from American control; short only of involving itself in the mutual suicide of a global nuclear war. Even so, the only time the world has been directly threatened with nuclear war is by the USA on an issue of third-world independence, namely over Cuba in 1962.

Latin America

The USA had been badly shaken by the miscalculation which had permitted a socialist regime to come to power by revolution in Cuba, though the attempts to reproduce the Cuban revolution elsewhere in Latin America in 1960-67 were in most cases fairly obvious failures. Yet, in spite of US attempts to defuse the revolutionary explosive on that continent by reformist policies (the so-called "Alliance for Progress"), the struggle for anti-imperialist and social liberation continued in various more solidly based forms than those of guerrilla incursions. The 1950s and 1960s had also been a period of dramatic social and economic change—and capitalist growth—in most of Latin America. As so often happens, the contradictions of capitalism first made themselves felt on its

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

margins. Thus by the late 1960s a more formidable wave of liberation struggle was ready to break out in several countries, except for Brazil, where an American-backed coup had in 1964 installed a powerful technocratic-military dictatorship, which prevented what might otherwise have been an eruption in 1968. As it happens, 1968 was an important year in its emergence, since it saw both the progressive military coup in Peru, and the mass student movement in Mexico which led to the Olympic Games massacre and—as noted earlier—a distinct political change in the Mexican regime, which had, for thirty years past, been an almost ideal dependency of the USA.

This new wave reached its peak with the Chilean Popular Unity government in 1970-3 and the great Argentinian movements of 1973-1974. As we know, it was defeated, and in several countries, drowned in blood. And the readiness of the US government to suppress or massacre movements which threatened its domination or to support those who did so, was never in much doubt in the 1960s. This made its defeat in Vietnam all the more dramatic and significant, because in that unhappy country American prestige and the overwhelming military force of the USA were directly committed. And the "Tet offensive" of 1968 made that defeat evident.

The "Tet Offensive"

It is no discredit to the extraordinary achievements of the Vietnamese people to say that the crucial front on which American imperialism was defeated was the home front. That is the usual case in liberation wars against overwhelming military power. In fact the will of the American government to fight would not have been broken, had not the Vietnamese forced the USA into a major war-effort and, above all, into involving its young citizens by conscription in a deeply unpopular war. Many Americans did not take part in the large and militant anti-war movement (of which the students became the spearhead), but very few were at any time actively for this evil war. The "Tet offensive", suicidal though it was, dramatically demonstrated the essential weakness of the American position in Vietnam—even in the very centre of Saigon. It proved, what has since been shown on other occasions, that even the military and economic might of the USA could not always prevent peoples establishing political regimes which the USA does not like.

III THE SOCIALIST WORLD

Finally we come to events in the socialist world. These reflected two developments. After 1945 the socialist world, previously confined to the USSR, had expanded to include a substantial number of countries of widely different history, social and economic characteristics, and internal problems. This raised not only the question of the relation of different socialist states with each other, but also, and more significantly, the question of different national roads of development *under* socialism. A related question, that of the different national roads *to* socialism, was also highly relevant to communist parties in non-socialist countries. In theory this problem had been recognised, but in practice the type of socialist development which had, for historical reasons, emerged in the rather special situation of the USSR, had been regarded as something like the general standard and model for all others.

But at the same time it also came to be admitted, at first very obliquely with great hesitations, that the Soviet model of development was itself open to very profound criticisms of various kinds. "De-stalinisation" in the USSR after 1956 brought these into the open, and at the same time revealed that the "socialist camp" could no longer be seen as a monolithic bloc under the unquestioned leadership of the CPSU. As early as 1955 the admission that Yugoslavia, which had left that monolithic bloc in 1948, was, after all, part of the community of socialist states, already implied this. A few years later the open split between the USSR and China further showed that, unfortunately, the relations between socialist states could also be hostile. In spite of attempts to close the ranks, the divergences within the international communist movement (whether represented by states or non-state parties) have continued to widen.

It is now evident that the leadership of the USSR in the years after the Twentieth Congress implicitly—and to some extent explicitly—recognised many of the weaknesses of the Soviet pattern of development, and made a major effort to remove them, without putting the system into jeopardy. Admitting the terrible crimes of the Stalin era, ending the most shocking abuses of that era and quietly "rehabilitating" many of its victims, alive or dead, was only part of this effort of reform. It also included the attempt to make the process of economic planning less rigidly centralised, more flexible and more responsive to demand, to weaken the bureaucracy, to take the cultural life of the country out of its Stalinist strait-jacket, to introduce elements of public debate into the discussion of policies, etc. This is not the place to assess the achievements and failures of the Khrushchev era in the USSR, which ended in 1964. What cannot be doubted is that it brought the problems of the deep-seated weaknesses in the Soviet model of development (which was also that of most socialist states in Eastern Europe) much closer to the surface. It encouraged attempts at reform and, where possible, the search

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

for improved or alternative methods of socialist development. In the USSR and Eastern Europe the search for reform, both economic and in the structure of rigid centralised decision-making, was accelerated in the early 1960s. For at this time economic difficulties made themselves felt, especially in agriculture, and, as already noted, it was realised that the economic progress of the capitalist industrial countries was more rapid than in the socialist ones. Moreover, the growing involvement in trade with the capitalist world created particular complications for some smaller socialist economies, especially the more industrialised ones, such as Czechoslovakia.

The Search for New Ways

The history of all socialist states in this period, including the USSR, is that of a search for new ways of socialist development appropriate to solving the problems of their various, and often divergent, situations, and which would avoid the mistakes of the past. Yet in many of them this search was made difficult by the long, and in many ways surviving, heritage of the Stalin era which had formed them. In many it was made even more difficult because political decisions could not be independent of the policies of the USSR. Hence the earliest radical attempts in the 1960s to change the system from within were made in two countries which were independent of the USSR: Yugoslavia and China.

In Yugoslavia alternative ways of socialist development had been pioneered after the break with the USSR in 1948, but the period of dramatic change really began in 1961 and reached its peak in the political crisis of 1966. The immediate occasion was the period of economic difficulty in the early 1960s which also affected Yugoslavia. In China the "Great Cultural Revolution" was launched in 1965 and was at its height in 1968. In line with Mao's belief in the supremacy of politics over economics, the impulse was political. Broadly speaking, these two countries took diametrically opposite socialist roads, both in internal and international policy. Yugoslavia moved further towards considerable decentralisation and market liberalisation in economic matters, and a substantial degree of individual freedom and workers' control, while politically the country strengthened its links as an independent with other communist parties and notably with the USSR. China pursued a foreign policy consistently dominated by hostility to the USSR, and a domestic policy which is still difficult for many to understand fully, but which, to put it mildly, was not characterised by practical concern for either economic or scientific growth or intellectual freedom. While an extreme egalitarianism was stressed at the base, and mass initiative from below was officially encouraged, in fact decisions were increasingly concentrated at the very summit.

The Czechoslovak Movement

The Czechoslovak movement was part of the very general trend to renewal and change which is visible in many socialist countries in the 1960s; indeed its roots go back to the mini-liberalisation of the Novotny regime in 1962. However, as was perhaps to be expected in a country so much more similar to the industrially advanced parts of Europe than to the relatively undeveloped ones further east and south, the effort of renewal was pushed considerably further than anywhere else. It included not only economic reforms not unlike those proposed elsewhere, and a liberalisation of cultural life such as also occurred gingerly elsewhere, though in Czechoslovakia it was much more radical. It envisaged a profound change in the nature and role of the Communist Party, though not abandoning its leading role in the socialist state. The Party, according to its "action programme" of April 6, 1968:

> "does not wish to assert its leading role by bringing pressure to bear on society. . . . The party cannot impose its authority, but must earn it continually by its action. . . . The party's aim is not to become a universal administrator of society, to bind and shackle the organisations and the whole life of society by its directives. . . . The party's policy must in no way make non-Communist citizens feel that their rights and their freedoms are being infringed by the party."

In short it envisaged a socialism which would be democratic, pluralist, national, stable and efficient —and, incidentally, with due regard for the interests of the USSR. For this reason the Czech experiment had a significance which went far beyond the country's boundaries. Nobody can say that, had it been allowed to proceed, success would have been quick, smooth or even certain. But there is no reason at all to believe that in one form or another the Czech model of a democratic socialism would not have been viable, or unable to overcome the political and economic difficulties which the other socialist states also face and have not always overcome.

The weakness of the Czechoslovak movement lay precisely in its international significance. Most states under communist leadership were under considerable internal strains, as they tried to adapt themselves to a situation for which the old models of the Stalin era were neither suited nor any longer effective. The Czech and Slovak Communists were in the fortunate position of being able both to change the leadership of their Party quietly and successfully, to transform its role, to democratise their national life and at the same

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

time to gain overwhelming popular support for themselves. Not all governing Communist parties could hope to do so without, as they believed, running incalculable political risks. Several did not believe that socialism, as they knew it and had built it up, could operate if the Party exchanged the role of giving orders for that of democratic leadership on the Czech model. Many of them had problems, even crises, which the Czech example would aggravate—for instance Poland at this very moment. The Czechs were the victims of these fears; or, to put it another way, of the failure of some other socialist countries to find their way to change and renewal as successfully as they did.

The tragic occupation of Czechoslovakia by the USSR followed. It was condemned by the bulk of the Communist parties in the industrial world outside the socialist sector, from the Japanese to the Spanish, as well as by China and Yugoslavia. They still condemn it.

IV THE EVENTS OF 1968

The events of 1968 are so various that they appear to have very little in common except their dramatic character and a certain unexpectedness. How many people in December 1967 would have predicted, or even expected, any of them? And yet they have two things in common. First, in the capitalist world, the socialist world and the "third world" the period after World War II was fundamentally different from that before 1945, and in their very different ways the events in all three sectors of the globe belong to this new period, and could not have happened in the old. Second, and more concretely, most of them have in common a particular political role of students, professional people and intellectuals. This unites May 1968 in France and the shift to the left in other parts of continental Europe, the anti-war movement in the USA, Mexico, the student demonstrations in Warsaw (which were suppressed) and those in Belgrade (which were not)—all in 1968—and, not least, the Prague Spring. It is perhaps worth noting that, while the student movements in the west considered themselves to be largely against capitalism, those in Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, and probably also in Poland, wished to improve socialism and not to abolish it.

It is perfectly clear that neither students nor professional and intellectual workers by themselves were or are a politically decisive force, even though they are not a negligible social force in our techno-scientific epoch. Their major function was to spark off movements greater than their own. Their strength, particularly in countries lacking any other legitimate forms of national political expression other than the official, or in regimes of institutionalised stability, which conceal the tensions below the rippling or unchanging surface of official party politics, is to have voices, communication, and (through the universities) the capacity to make some sort of mass demonstrations. In such circumstances—and they existed for different reasons both in the stable conservative regimes of the west and under socialism—literary journals and gatherings and universities can, temporarily, play a crucial role in national developments. Their power in 1968 lay not in themselves, but in getting others to move—the working-class movement, parties, even governments (as in Yugoslavia, where Tito recognised publicly—in a television broadcast—that the students had reminded the nation's leaders, preoccupied with administrative and economic problems, of socialist aspirations they had neglected). Isolated from this wider context, like the French students after June 1968, such movements lost their significance and influence.

The End of the Feast

Ten years have passed since 1968. Looking back, we can see that it marks a turning-point in the capitalist world, but probably only an episode elsewhere. The struggle for liberation in the dependent world had never ceased, and continues. It is possible to pick out 1968 as the beginning of one particular temporary phase of it in some parts of the world (for instance, Latin America), but no more. Similarly the long and difficult process of adapting socialism to a historic period when it no longer consisted exclusively of a single isolated, backward and beleaguered country desperately trying to concentrate centuries of economic and cultural development into a couple of decades, did not begin in 1968, and has not ended. 1968 marks important critical moments in this contradictory, and sometimes tragic process, but no more than some other post-war years, such as 1956. And in no country, not even in unhappy Czechoslovakia, can we say that it marks either its end, or its definitive success, or failure. The process continues in different countries in different ways. Only in the developed capitalist world did 1968 mark the end of a lengthy period which can realistically be considered as a whole, the epoch of US world economic hegemony and of the great global boom: and it announced the period of global capitalist crisis and political complexity which emerged within a few years, and in which we still live. It stands in a curious relation to the present period: rather as the intellectual ferment and the great "labour unrest" of the years immediately preceding 1914, stand to what came after. In 1967 Belshazzar was enjoying himself at his feast. In 1968 the writing appeared on the wall, announcing the end of the feast. And it has ended.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

1478 1978 **Oxford University Press**

Marxism and Politics
Ralph Miliband
"This book is lucid and readable, and wears its scholarship lightly. Within the limitations of its approach, it is an excellent introduction to the subject, and an interesting contribution to the development of a Marxist political theory."
The Times Higher Education Supplement. £3.50 *Oxford Paperbacks* £1.75

Marxism and Literature
Raymond Williams
"Raymond Williams is important not just for what he says but for where he stands . . . he has earned the right to discourse above the level of ordinary critical exchange. The explorations and integrations which this book makes will bring a major pressure to bear on academic literary criticism and its institutions."
New Statesman. £3.50 *Oxford Paperbacks* £1.75

Karl Marx: Selected Writings
Edited by David McLellan
"As a textbook for a student examining Marx under a predetermined course of study, Professor McLellan's book is ideal. It is cheap, better produced than (its main competitor), the introductory notes to each section are masterpieces of brevity and relevance, and there is a good index." *Morning Star.* £7.95
paper covers £3.95

Karl Marx
His Life and Environment
Isaiah Berlin
"The author's admirable ability to translate many abstruse and obscure notions of Marxism into a clear language and his virtuosity in showing connections between personalities, characters, attitudes on the one hand and doctrinal issues on the other are unparalleled in the existing literature." Leszek Kolokowski.
Fourth edition £3.95 paper covers £1.95 OPUS

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Lawrence & Wishart – some new and recent titles

ANTONIO GRAMSCI
Selections from Political Writings 1921-1926
Edited and translated by Quintin Hoare

This volume, which also contains texts by other Italian Communist leaders, covers the most important years of Gramsci's political life, when he emerged as a national leader in the period from the formation of the Italian Communist Party, to the rise and triumph of fascism and his own imprisonment.
Publication date 18th May *hardback £10*

MARX AND ENGELS COLLECTED WORKS
In Fifty Volumes
Volume 9: 1849

The final volume of three (volumes 7, 8 and 9) which contain a complete collection of Marx's and Engels's continuous analysis, originally published in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, as participants and observers in the revolutionary years 1848-49 in Vienna, Berlin and Paris.
Publication date 18th May *hardback £5*

'EUROCOMMUNISM' AND THE STATE
Santiago Carrillo

". . . raises important questions which require to be thoroughly discussed in the Communist movement" —Reuben Falber in *Morning Star*.
hardback £5.95 paperback £2.75

ARMIES AND POLITICS
Jack Woddis

Contains a detailed examination of military coups in Indonesia, Sudan and Chile, as well as a thorough assessment of the role of the armed forces in Portugal. This book also discusses recent changes in the attitude of the Left towards the military, including the question of trade-union rights, and other approaches which challenge orthodoxy left and right.
hardback £6

CLASS AND CLASS STRUCTURE
Edited by Alan Hunt

These essays discuss the definition of such key concepts as 'the working class', 'the petty bourgeoisie' and 'the middle class' which have preoccupied and often confused political debate and current economic analysis. Contributors: Alan Hunt; Stuart Hall; Vic Allen; Nicos Poulantzas; Paul Hirst; Jean Gardiner; John Westergaard.
paperback £2.95

CLASS, HEGEMONY AND PARTY
Edited by Jon Bloomfield

The first of a series of books which will make available each year a selection from the most outstanding contributions to the Communist University of London. Contributors: Richard Gunn; Stuart Hall; Robert Gray; Barry Hindess; and Gerry Leversha.
paperback £1.50

ANTONIO GRAMSCI
Selections from Political Writings 1910-1920

Covers the period of the First World War, the collapse of the Second International, the Russian Revolution, and the founding of the Communist International. Contains also additional articles by Bordiga and Tasca.
Translated by John Mathews. Edited and Introduced by Quintin Hoare.
hardback £6 paperback £3

CRITIQUE OF POLITICAL ECONOMY
Karl Marx
Edited with an Introduction by Maurice Dobb

This book, in which Marx first expounded his labour theory of value and theory of money, has recently been re-issued. *hardback £2*

Lawrence & Wishart, 39 Museum Street, London WC1A 1LQ

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Events of May-June 1968 in France

Interview with Jean Elleinstein

(Jean Elleinstein, well-known French Communist historian, Deputy-Director of the Centre of Marxist Studies and Research (CERM) and Communist parliamentary candidate in the Latin Quarter of Paris, gives his personal views on May-June 1968 in France. The questions are printed in italics and the replies follow. The interview was conducted for Marxism Today *by* **MONTY JOHNSTONE.**[1])

The events of May/June 1968 in France attracted the attention of the whole world. At that time Jean Elleinstein, you were working at the Sorbonne and were Branch Secretary of the PCF (French Communist Party) there. You were therefore able to observe these events at close quarters as a participant as well as a historian. Could you first of all very briefly describe how the May/June events came about?

Well, there are several factors to consider here. It is clear that, at the beginning, we had the crisis in the universities—a crisis revealed by the actions of the students, particularly at Nanterre, the Movement of March 22nd, and then in the Latin Quarter. These actions in the universities had a profound effect on a great number of students who were beginning to question the ways in which the universities were run, the organisation of teaching, the employment problems, and a whole range of problems crucial to university life. Therefore I would say that the real origin of the May/June events was a crisis in the universities which was of considerable importance and which must be linked with the development of similar crises in other countries at that time. I am thinking of the events in the USA, and of the mass demonstrations and events of a similar nature in West Germany, and of course we must also remember the Prague Spring and the Chinese Cultural Revolution. This means that there was a new international situation and we were witnessing, in a number of countries, the emergence of a movement both within the universities and outside. This movement was relatively important and questioned existing structures, governments and policies—and it touched on other areas, too, areas we were not too sure about—and about which we are perhaps not too sure even today. But in any case, it was something new to the situation at that time and that is an essential element to be considered when we talk of the origin of the events of May 68.

But I think we must also understand that it was only in France that the events of 68 led to a great *national* crisis, that is, we did not remain at the level of a crisis in the universities—I am not of course speaking of China or Czechoslovakia where the conditions were structurally different—what I mean is that in the capitalist countries it was only in France that the crisis of 68 assumed a national dimension and was of considerable importance for the history of our country. And I believe that this is linked to the fact that the crisis in the universities served as a catalyst for a much broader crisis, which was a crisis of society. In a France dominated by Gaullism since 1958, where, indisputably, economic development had been considerable but where, at the same time, there was the unprecedented domination of large-scale capitalism, the events of 68 were a confrontation of a new type between, I would say, the great mass of the French people and big business which was using the state in a totally new way.

So it was triggered by the detonator of the student movement and there were the confrontations in the Latin Quarter between students. . . .

Yes.

and the police. . . .

which is furthermore linked to the repression of that movement. The cycle which was established: student provocation/police repression, etc., clearly posed the problem of power.

But until then were there any links between the workers' movement and the students?

Absolutely not.

Absolutely not?

There were normal links at the level of political and union organisations but there was no strong link between the workers and what was after all a

[1] Text translated from the French by Colin Mercer from a tape transcribed by Paulette Hutchinson.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

relatively new student movement. We have to understand the history of the French university. In 1956, 57, 58, the French university was very much on the right; the majority of the students favouring the right, and it was only after 57/58, as a result of the Algerian war on the one hand and the expansion of the universities on the other, that is, with the university "explosion" and the great increase in the number of students and the democratisation of the universities in social terms —only then were there any profound changes in the university sector which oriented it towards the left. And I believe that it is in this context that we must understand the relation between the events of 68 and the development of the Communist Party itself. We have to ask what was the nature of the evolution of the PCF since 1956, that is, since the 20th Congress of the CPSU? In fact, the PCF refused to acknowledge the 20th Congress, that is, it did not discuss in any serious way the problems posed by the Congress, and it refused to study the Khrushchev Report. . . .

The report "attributed to Khrushchev . . .".

. . . others said that it did not exist and contrary to the Italian Communists and Communists in a number of other countries, including Britain, the PCF minimised the importance of the 20th Congress and we could even say that Thorez was probably in disagreement with a great number of the orientations of the 20th Congress. It was, in fact, necessary in the West not to minimise the 20th Congress but to go much further. . . . Contrary to Togliatti and the PCI and other parties, Thorez and the PCF refused to draw conclusions from the 20th Congress in any profound way. I am not saying that there weren't, here and there, a certain number of efforts made, but there was ultimately no profound and serious analysis of the phenomenon of Stalinism—on the contrary, in fact, those who demanded this were often expelled from the Party, as was the case with a good number of intellectuals at that time. So the result was that the PCF was really not very well placed or equipped to deal with the problems posed by the history of this period, and by the history of France in particular.

Along with the 20th Congress and the demolition of the old myths on which the logic of the PCF depended at this time—concerning the Russian Revolution, the road to socialism, etc. etc. —there was the transformation of French society, specifically in terms of its urbanisation. . . . And I think we can say that what happened in the PCF, its lag in all these areas, was tragic because it was not able to understand or analyse the new phenomena of French society, it was not able adequately to analyse Stalinism and its consequences, and could not sufficiently elaborate a new strategy and adapt its politics in order to renew itself and develop as a great political force which could win over not only the workers but the students, the intellectuals, etc.

This is further illustrated by an event the importance of which must be understood because, ultimately, it was the herald and indicator of the lag in the PCF. I am speaking of the crisis in the UEC (the Union of Communist Students) between 1961-64/5. While I would not want to defend all of the demands of the Communist students, they did pose certain problems.

And the Party did not respond?

The Party did not respond fully, seriously and deeply. The beginning of a response emerged, but it did not really face up seriously to these problems.

And it is because of this that the "leftist" groups had such a strong influence?

Of course. The "leftist" phenomenon developed in the space left empty by the CP and, quite naturally, a great number of Communist students and those who were not Communists but nevertheless close to the Party felt that the Party did not offer them a way forward. On the contrary, the Party's attitude to the problems posed by these groups was very discouraging. Obviously the way in which these problems were posed was not always the most suitable, and I think that sometimes the problems posed concealed other more serious issues at the time. Nevertheless, I think that the PCF must take a certain amount of responsibility for the crisis in the UEC—a responsibility which is directly related to the Party's consistent lag evident since 1956. Furthermore, if we compare the evolution of the PCF with that of the PCI—because, after all, this is a comparison which we are forced to make—we note that the PCI approached the problem of Stalinism, of destalinisation, and approached the problems of an Italian road to socialism, as well as the new problems posed by the evolution of Italian society precisely in terms of its urbanisation and industrialisation, and that because of this, the PCI has made considerably greater advances. . . .

But in any case, the PCF registered some progress, as, for example, in the 1967 elections. . . .

Yes, that's true. Yes, there were the beginnings of a move forward precisely because from 1967 the Communist Party began to evolve. It was a small beginning. It began by fighting for a Common Governmental Programme, for the Union of the Left, of which, as everybody could see, the Communist Party was the most ardent supporter,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

even more so as the Socialist Party expended much energy in trying to stay out of it. . .. The PCF progressed because it had started to modify its analysis of the ways to achieve socialism. In particular, this was modified with regard to the political system which it envisaged since, at the 17th Congress in 1964, it renounced the idea of a one-party system.

Were the May/June events totally unexpected by the Party?

Unexpected? Yes—in their extent certainly. But first of all we should say that they were unexpected by everybody. . . .

But in any case the PCF contributed to a certain extent to create the atmosphere which. . . .

That is clearly the case. By the initiatives developed in certain areas and on certain terrains, and in particular in the university sector since 1956, with all its contradictions, equivocations, ambiguities and inadequacies which I talked about earlier, the Party naturally contributed to develop this movement. But I believe that what was serious was that in 1968—and for the reasons I suggested just now—it was not capable of effectively handling the situation or of playing a leading role. And the movement developed autonomously from the Party. And I would say not only autonomously, but even in certain respects and in particular with regard to its attitudes during the events, *against* the Party.

You mean in the universities?

Yes, of course, I mean in the universities.

So we arrive at the stage when, on May 10-11, there were confrontations between students and police and when the working class entered into the struggle, first of all with the great one-day general strike of May 13 in support of the students, followed by the factory occupations and the strike of 9 million workers lasting several weeks.

Yes, that is precisely the case. The workers—and not only manual workers but also salaried workers—took the bit between their teeth and the strike spread across France very rapidly and certain forms of trade union action were undertaken at that moment which gave their imprint to the movement. I believe, in fact, that there are three problems which were posed at that time, and I would like to try and break them down into their basic elements in order to understand them better. Firstly, was the situation revolutionary or not? I believe this to be the essential question to be posed because the PCF was accused of having worked. . . .

Of having prevented . . . ?

Of having prevented the revolution from being carried out. To this question I reply very, very emphatically, and I firmly believe that it is impossible to doubt the fact that the situation was not at all revolutionary in the traditional meaning of the word. That is to say that there were great masses involved in the movement—millions of workers of all kinds, students, intellectuals, but their aim was neither a political nor an economic revolution. So the objectives of this movement were not at all revolutionary objectives, and I believe in fact that to pose the question in this way is to pose it in terms of an outmoded conception of revolution. Because in reality, when we say that the situation was revolutionary, what is meant is that we are in the same situation as in Russia in 1917, and that therefore it would be enough for the vanguard to go and occupy the Elysee Palace as the Winter Palace had been occupied in November 1917. We must clearly see things as they were. We were in a completely new type of situation that nobody had imagined or foreseen quite simply because it had not been posed until then.

Now secondly: we have the question of political "leftism". Well it is true that throughout these events a political "leftism" found expression, and this expression was even more encouraged because the PCF was lagging in relation to a large number of political problems which I mentioned just now, and which had an influence on certain sections, especially the students. . . . Political "leftism" developed and gained a credibility which it had never achieved before and will never achieve again. So I believe that the PCF had a very clear attitude to it and, I say this in weighing my words very carefully, after 10 years of reflection, it was absolutely correct. That is to say, it fought it, and it fought it because it considered that it was not possible to carry out a revolution in the classical sense of the word, precisely because the situation was not revolutionary and that there was even a great danger involved in trying to make a revolution, in cutting off the vanguard from the masses, thereby leading to the isolation of this vanguard and of the PCF. The Party did this in ways which were perhaps too brutal in certain respects and at certain moments, but ultimately the important thing is not to pick out specific details of what was done and the ways in which they were done, but to see that there was this political "leftism", and the Party fought the strategy which supported this tendency.

But, and here we come to my third problem: in combating this political "leftism", and judging the situation quite correctly not to be revolu-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tionary, the PCF tended to ignore a third aspect of these events which seems to me to be absolutely essential and which was in fact a fundamentally new aspect. This was that not only among intellectuals and students, but also among the masses involved in strikes and a whole range of other actions widely reported by the press and much written about since then—in all of this there was the evidence of a crisis in society as a whole—evidence which the PCF had not seen. The crisis in society and civilisation expressed by the events of May 68, the great problems which were, I would say, *qualitatively* new, such as the problems of organisational hierarchies within the enterprises, the problem of struggle against the state and against bureaucratisation, the problem posed by the setbacks of the Soviet Revolution, and the ways in which we could approach in a new way the problem of Stalinism, the question of feminism, questions of the relations between culture and society, problems of social inequality, the problems of youth, and in sum, the problems of human relations—all of this, in effect, the PCF had not seen. That is to say that it identified cultural "leftism"—the word "leftism" itself is a little equivocal and therefore dangerous, but I will use it in deference to linguistic habits—but it did not therefore see enough and perhaps did not see at all the real problems involved. Therefore it fought all of this as if it were a single homogeneous entity by saying "all this is dangerous, all this is 'leftism', it will lead to catastrophe, etc., etc.". And clearly this contributed to its isolation from the new forces which were emerging at this time on this new terrain.

With regard to the working class, do you think that the Party played a positive role?

Yes, in this case the Party played an absolutely essential role because the great masses in the workers' movement were very influenced by the Party, often it was the CGT (left-wing trade union federation) which dominated the trade union movement and it helped to avoid an over-dramatic confrontation between the ruling power and the workers. This was particularly the case with the signing of the Grenelle agreements[2] and the discussions on collective agreements on wages, conditions and control.

Yes, and it is precisely on this issue that I want to ask you to comment because it has been said that the Communist trade union leaders tried to hold back the workers' struggles and to persuade the workers to get back to work as soon as possible on the basis of the Grenelle agreements so as not to damage the electoral perspectives of the Party. What is your opinion on this?

In this case I believe that the Communist Party was true to its own reasoning: as long as they adjudged the situation not to be revolutionary in the classical sense of the word, what could a prolonged strike lead to? It was a question of winning quantitative demands, but it was impossible to let the strike simply run its own course to the extent of vitiating relations between the workers and the ruling power. We could not raise hopes that the strike would become revolutionary. It was very important to negotiate with the government and the employers for salary agreements of a new type, but which would be part of the long line of negotiations already established in the history of modern France. The PCF was wise enough and skilful enough to encourage these negotiations: as you know, the CGT played an important role in the Grenelle discussions and straight away it was crucial to explain to the workers the necessity to accept these agreements because there were no other possibilities in the situation at that time than to negotiate such agreements, to accept them, and to return to work. Otherwise the strike would have become insurrectionary with all the consequences that would have involved given that the situation was judged to be negative in terms of revolutionary potential. I stress again that historically the judgment of the PCF on this question was correct. The problem, I think, cannot be posed at this level, but must be posed on another terrain – the terrain of what I described just now as the problems of society, civilisation and culture which the PCF ignored, was contemptuous of, or even sometimes fought against at this time. It is here that we can locate the main error of the PCF in relation to the events of May 68; it is not in having encouraged the signing of the Grenelle agreements and subsequently in having persuaded the workers to return to their jobs. And furthermore we can see this very well in the fact that the majority of French public opinion feared a possible escalation into a situation of civil war. We remember the appeal of General de Gaulle on May 30, 1968, and the right-wing mass demonstrations on the Champs Elysées that followed it; and of course we must not forget the elections at the end of June in 1968 which were a triumph for the right-wing majority.

Yes, and on this I have a question to put to you.

Yes, and there, you understand, there is a link – the proof that a large part of the French popula-

[2] Grenelle agreements were negotiated during the strike between Government, employers and trade unions and represented important economic and social gains for the workers.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tion, of public opinion, did not look favourably on an insurrectionary seizure of power at that time. . . .

Of course.

. . . that nothing would really justify it. Nothing would really justify it and here I think we must re-establish a certain historical truth—that there was no unified strategy, no agreement between the principal forces of the left.

But the Party did try to establish such an agreement, did it not?

The Socialists had refused since 1962 any agreement on a governmental programme. They engaged in an ideological debate which was interesting, and which I would not say that they were totally wrong to open up. However, finally they refused an agreement on a governmental programme but accepted an electoral agreement which brought indisputable successes as in 1967 where the majority had only one seat more than the Opposition which was not very much. The attempts made by the Communist Party to reach agreement on a governmental programme during the events of May 68 failed. And when the Socialists unilaterally posed the question of power (the declarations of Mitterand and Mendès-France) they revealed, we must say, in relation to the student movement, a certain demagogy. By which I mean that they accepted a certain number of things with which they were in total disagreement, they accepted them because they were, in the minds of a certain number of people, students. I think that the absence of a united strategy for the main parties of the left, and in particular because of the refusal of the Socialist Party to sign a common programme of government was an essential factor in the prevention of a political outcome to the movement of May 1968. There are always only two choices: either one has an insurrection which defeats the existing power bloc, with the creation of an insurrectionary power which governs, organises perhaps elections after coming to power, but which in all events relies on an insurrection; or you have a power which is democratically elected with all the inadequacies and reserves which political democracy in our countries reveals; but ultimately it is a power which is democratically established, and. . . .

Yes, that is why the "leftists'" slogan "Elections = Betrayal" had to be rejected.

It was absolutely stupid, that's clear. . . .

Can I ask you how the PCF conceived of the relation between economic and social demands in May/June, and the resolution of the political problems posed at that time?

Well, it conceived of this relation precisely in terms of the signing of a common governmental programme which would depend on a united strategy to enable us to achieve a parliamentary majority. This was something which was nearly achieved in 1968 by a much narrower margin than in 1978, since the total number of Opposition seats was more important, in relation to those of the majority, in 1968 than it is in 1978. So I think that there were real opportunities, based on the initiatives of the PCF, which could have resulted in the signing of such a common programme of government, which would have offered a credible alternative to the existing majority. The principal argument used by the majority against the Opposition, which had some basis, was that the Opposition was incapable of coming to an agreement whereby they could govern together.

And it is this which explains why this movement —the most powerful militant and democratic movement of the post-war period—which started in May, was followed in June by a political setback for the left which lost almost a million votes by comparison with the previous year?

Well, there are two aspects to consider here. Firstly, the incapacity of the social movement to become a political movement for the reasons I outlined earlier; and, secondly, the fears of a large section of public opinion faced with the Paris events and the excesses of "leftism". These excesses were fostered and painstakingly exploited by the powers-that-be. The barricades in the Latin Quarter, the burning cars—all of this was cynically broadcast to the whole of France and disturbed a significant section of the middle classes and the peasantry, and, it must be said, a number of the workers, too, who did not want to move into a civil war situation or revolutionary events in the 1848 sense of the term. . . . The inability to come to an agreement, and the inability to respond to the new problems posed by the events of 68, the inability to formulate a new strategy for the transition to socialism, all of this taken together explains the victory of the majority in the elections at the end of June 1968.

From May 20 the Party had demanded the creation of thousands of action committees for a popular and democratic government. What was the result of this?

This initiative of the Party was established primarily to fight the attempts of the Socialist Party and the socialist left to develop its own strategy and to form a pole of attraction without the Communist Party, against the Communist

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Party, for the 68ers. These action committees did not have a great effect; they really did not manage to gain a footing and they remained relatively unimportant organisms which moreover went out of existence very rapidly. But the Communist Party and the CGT managed to mobilise the masses on urgent questions and in particular there was a mass demonstration organised on May 29, and which was very, very important precisely because it was centred on the idea of a democratic and popular government and because it posed the political problems of the strategy of unity and of a programmatic agreement between the PCF and the FDGS (I say FDGS since that was the grouping which united socialists and radicals).

So, did the events of May/June contribute to the development of this union of the left which the PCF had been seeking for so long?

Certainly not in a direct way. With the exit of De Gaulle in 1969 and the election of Pompidou, the Socialist Party was still continuing its search for a strategy which would exclude the Communist Party from the necessary political alliance. This was to show itself, in 1969, with the exit of De Gaulle, in the socialist support given to Poher in the second round of the elections and was also evident in Deferre's socialist candidature in the first, which was a catastrophic failure, however, since he obtained 5.01 per cent of the vote. I would say, therefore, that from this point of view the prospect of unity took a step backwards in the months which followed 68 and until 1971. The main difficulty for the PCF arose from the fact that it had not understood sufficiently at the time the necessity for a profound destalinisation, for a profound change in the nature of its activities and its structures—the need for some sort of renovation. Because of this situation, the Party was not able to benefit sufficiently from the 68 situation in the years which followed, and in particular it was incapable of profiting from the failure of the Socialists in 1969 by creating a situation similar to that we witnessed in Italy after the experience of the Centre-Left and the resultant reduction of the influence of the Socialist Party. But this is because its transformation was slow to come about and because finally it held its 22nd Congress[3] 15-20 years late.

What I am stating here is a personal opinion—and it is important that I stress quite emphatically for the readers of your journal—that certain French Communists do not agree with me on this historical analysis, on these evaluations and that they form the subject of debates which are still taking place within the Communist Party.

Agreed. But at least with the 22nd Congress, new theses have been advanced, certain of which perhaps had their roots in May 1968.

Yes, that is evident.

Would you like to be specific?

The events of May/June 1968 and their profound repercussions naturally had important consequences in relation to the evolution, however slow, of the Communist Party. This situation confronted the Party in a decisive way with new problems and it was only in 1975/6 that it started to evolve in a whole range of areas—an evolution which has not finished—an evolution which is still in progress. I would say in fact that we are only just at the beginning of this evolution. There are numerous problems confronting the Party. Primarily these connected with the understanding of the problems which concern us about society, civilisation and culture and here we must also pose the question of control and self-management, the problems of women's condition, an understanding of feminism different from that of the past, etc., etc. . . . Secondly, a more conscientious analysis of the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries; a more profound analysis and a stronger and more matured critique of what is happening. This is beginning to emerge, but is not yet adequate. Thirdly, a renovation of the Party's own structure and functioning: all of which poses the question of more democratic forms of organisation and work. These are some of the questions which I would say our 22nd Congress opened up.

Opened up?

Yes. I don't believe that it resolved them, but it is clear enough that it opened them up.

To conclude, how would you assess the historical extent and impact of May/June 1968 and its meaning for the developed capitalist countries?

Well, I would say that the formulation presented by Waldeck Rochet[4] to the Central Committee following the events of May/June 1968 is completely valid. He said that this was the first great confrontation of the contemporary era, between what we have termed "state monopoly capitalism" and the masses, and that from this point of view these events were crucial. Not only for France but for a certain number of other countries. The form in which the confrontation took place, the form in which it might take place again in the future—these are not the most important aspects. What is

[3] The 22nd Congress of the PCF was held in 1976.

[4] The General Secretary of the PCF at the time of the May Events.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

important is to see the new nature of the problems posed by May 68 and to understand that, ultimately, it was the whole capitalist world which was directly or indirectly shaken by these events.

The effects of it are not always very clear, nor are they very well understood. In history effects are not always immediate and direct. I believe that we should not look too narrowly or too rigidly to judge the events—that we have to relate them to the historical process and if we look at the mass of events which have taken place in this last part of the 20th century, I believe that finally, to speak frankly, the situation in which we find ourselves in the West can be characterised in the following terms: The revolution has failed. . . .

The revolution?

The socialist revolution.

The socialist revolution as we conceived of it. . . .

As we conceived of it, it has failed. It has failed. For a century and a half we have been running after a non-existent revolution in the West.

In principle non-existent because of the differences between East and West which Gramsci noted?

Yes. That's it.

And in any case this revolution failed because it did not take place. We can consider what took place in countries of the Soviet-type, but that is not the problem that we are discussing here. Anyway, there has not been a revolution in the West. There were transformations, there were reforms, often not very important, but after all, let us say we have achieved, thanks to the workers' struggles, a better quality of life and the welfare state. This was the result of our action in the West. I would not say that this is insignificant because the situation of workers today is not what it was in the last century. But having said that, we have not managed to change in any determinant way the course of history. I believe that we have not managed to overturn the socio-economic structures, we have not resolved all these problems, and I think that the interest of the events of May 68 is without doubt their role as the harbinger of dramatic changes which will affect Western society and that the economic crisis which we have been experiencing for some years now will be extended and that very new and important elements which have not yet been fully defined will have many important consequences. I find this very interesting because in the West there were revolutions in the 19th century, there were revolutions in the East in the 20th Century, so perhaps we are preparing for the 21st century in the West.

But there is still a perspective for a socialist revolution, but of a new type.

That is exactly what I believe—it is necessary to agree on our terms. For me the revolution in our century can only be the product of an accumulation of reforms, on condition that these are structural reforms and not paltry reforms which just give 10 more francs to the worker and put 1 per cent more on the pension. No, it's not at this level that the problem can be posed but on the broader scale of a profound reform of structures. . . . Either we have a model for socialist revolution close to that of the Winter Palace or the Long March, or we have a socialist revolution which can only be a slow process of transformation; that is, a revolution which is a gradualist revolution. I do not believe that there are any alternative perspectives for the working-class movement and for Western Europe.

I find that we are abandoning the traditional theses about revolution, but we are having difficulty in constructing a really new thesis. This leads to a certain empiricism and a certain pragmatism which seems to me to be rather dangerous because it does not enable us in a sufficiently clear and effective way to insert our daily political action into a long-term perspective.

And how would you differentiate yourself from traditional social democratic perspectives?

Precisely by making it clear what we mean by the term "social democratic". Until 1914 Lenin was a social democrat. He was a disciple of Kautsky. Well, I think that we must not understand the term social democrat in the Schmidt and Callaghan sense. I would differentiate myself totally from that because in their case reforms are not linked to a revolutionary perspective. It is a question of a totally new relationship between reform and revolution which is not what I would call the traditional Leninist road any more than it is the road of social democracy which became traditional after the 1914 war. I would say that we have to start from the analyses of the German social democrats at the beginning of the 20th century and go much further than them in the light of historical experience accumulated since then as well as in the light of the economic, social and cultural transformations which have taken place since then in the West. We must reflect and advance on a road to socialism for the economically and culturally developed countries of the West—this is the problem with which we are confronted and I think we must pursue our efforts to the end. We must abandon the old schemas and find new ones. And I would say that these new schemas must in many respects go beyond the traditional antagonism between Communists and Socialists.

Thank you very much.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Collet's

LONDON BOOKSHOP
64-66 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0BD
01-836 6306

Current and forthcoming titles:

1. POWER AND THE STATE. Edited by Garry Littlejohn, Barry Smart, John Wateford and Nira Yuval-Davis (Croon Helm) **£4.50**
2. WHAT DOES THE RULING CLASS DO WHEN IT RULES? Goran Therborn (N.L.B.) **£7.50**
3. THE ITALIAN COMMUNISTS SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES Edited by Don Sassoon (Spokesman) **£2.95**
4. EUROCOMMUNISM AND SOCIALISM—Fernando Claudin (N.L.B.) **£4.75**
5. TROTSKY—Irving Howe (Fontana Modern Masters) **£1.25**
6. STATE AND CAPITAL—A MARXIST DEBATE Edited by John Holloway and M. Picciotto **£3.50**
7. CRITICAL TEXTS IN SOCIAL WORK AND THE WELFARE STATE—Paul Corrigan (Macmillan) **£2.95**
8. THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION—M. N. Roy (second-hand) **£6.00**
9. STALIN—Souverine (second-hand) **£12.00**

FOR THE WIDEST RANGE OF LITERATURE BY AND FOR THE LEFT

Opening hours:

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Saturday	9.30 to 6.00
Thursday	9.30 to 7.00
Friday	10.30 to 7.00

FOR MAIL ORDERS please add 35p per book postage and packing.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

People's War Comes to the Towns: Tet 1968

Liz Hodgkin

On January 31, 1968, in the early hours of the morning of the third day of Tet (the Vietnamese New Year), Vietnamese liberation forces struck simultaneously at nearly all the cities and major towns in South Vietnam.[1]

In Saigon, the capital of South Vietnam, the most dramatic event, the universal lead story, was the attack on the US Embassy which was stormed and occupied for about six hours by a small force of about 19 commandos. The Embassy had been inaugurated only in November and was built like a fortress without windows, so well defended by its perimeter walls that it proved very difficult for US troops to get inside the grounds to dislodge the guerrillas. "Independence Palace", the presidential residence, was attacked and its gardens occupied: both the palace and the South Korean Embassy next door were damaged by gunfire. Another task force took over the radio station for several hours while a fourth attacked Tan Son Nhat, the main airport of Saigon, occupying the barracks and part of the US headquarters and blowing up planes on the runways; Bien Hoa airport was also shelled. When the liberation forces were forced out they withdrew to the poorer quarters of Saigon and its twin city Cholon; here seven areas were under the control of the National Liberation Front (NLF) for up to a week and NLF forces held out for nearly three weeks round the Phu Tho racecourse and, aided by Buddhist bonzes, in the An Quang pagoda.

In the areas under NLF control (and occasionally elsewhere) leaflets were distributed calling on the southern population to drive out the US aggressors, overturn the Thieu-Ky clique[2] and liberate the country. Demonstrations in favour of the Front were held in NLF-controlled Cholon and in the Phu Lai quarter where they were dispersed by the Saigon police. In some of the areas held longest, revolutionary self-defence corps and self-management committees were set up.

In the Central Highlands Kontum, Pleiku and Ban Me Thuot were attacked and partially occupied with heavy fighting continuing for several days. In Dalat, the mountain resort, former rest centre for the French colons and now for the Americans and Vietnamese upper classes, liberation forces held out for weeks in the central market-place. Danang, the key port, where the main US air base was situated, was attacked, and the airport damaged. In the delta the provincial capitals of Ben Tre, My Tho and Can Tho were occupied for a time and there was especially bitter fighting round Vinh Long, Hoi An, Quy Nhon, Tuy Hoa, Quang Tri . . . in all 6 major cities, 37 province capitals and large towns, hundreds of district capitals and townships, 30 airfields, 6 radio stations and numerous other targets were attacked.

Hue

The historic city of Hue, the old imperial capital in central Vietnam, centre of the Buddhist revolt against Diem in 1963 and against Thieu and Ky in 1966, was the town occupied longest by the liberation forces in 1968, the only city where a unified revolutionary power was set up, from after midnight on January 31 till February 25. Here the NLF were greeted by the majority of the population. French journalists, who walked through the lines a few days after the NLF attack, described how the youth brought food to the NLF soldiers who were joking and laughing with the people.[3]

Only after long and painful house-to-house fighting, mostly by American troops, and massive bombing which damaged or destroyed 18,000 out of 20,000 houses in the city did the town fall and it, too, appeared to be a moral victory for the NLF: at dawn on February 25 the besieging forces saw that the NLF flag was no longer flying from the citadel and advancing they found that the opposing forces had slipped out during the night.

Limited War

By the end of 1967 the US had 486,000 troops in Vietnam; in addition there were 61,000 troops from US Pacific allies, mostly South Korean (but also 7,700 Australians and 400 New Zealanders).

[1] Five towns were attacked a day earlier, on January 30, possibly because the command of the Vietnamese fifth zone had not received a postponement order.

[2] Nguyen Van Thieu was President and Nguyen Cao Ky Vice-President of the Republic of South Vietnam.

[3] *Le Monde*, 6/2/1968.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Saigon army, including all the special forces, was already well over half a million (it was to double by 1975), a large proportion of the population in a country of only 17 million.

Vietnamese writers like to divide the "American war" up to Tet 1968 into two phases. From 1961 till 1964 it was the "special war" when the US tried to carry out a "war by proxy" building up the Saigon army and economy, pouring in munitions, goods, dollars and US "advisers" (25,000 of them by 1964) to enable the Saigon regime to win the war against the "Viet Cong". This having failed the phase of "limited war" began: the war was escalated and carried to the North with the bombing of North Vietnam while US fighting men were introduced into the South in ever-increasing numbers. By 1967 US public opinion had begun to waver even among former hawks like the ex-Secretary for Defence MacNamara; in the autumn the Johnson government launched a "success offensive" to calm this growing opposition. "We have reached an important point," promised Westmoreland, Commander-in-Chief of US Forces in Vietnam, in his major speech on November 21, "when the end begins to come in view."

The ARVN Forces

Militarily the US had been taken completely by surprise by the Tet offensives. In previous years there had been a truce over Tet; this was cancelled by the US on January 30 after the first attacks and had already been shortened to only 36 hours. Although there had, apparently, been a certain amount of advance warning from captured documents it had been generally discounted as unbelievable. The US were obsessed by the memory of the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu and since November they had been massing troops in their base at Khe Sanh, in the far North-West, which was surrounded by NLF troops. Just before Tet, in November 1967, there were two large-scale attacks, one on the town of Loc Ninh the second on a US base in the far west, Dak To. These may have been rehearsals for the large-scale attacks of Tet or a diversion—successful, because the US started to move forces from the coast to the highlands. (In fact, during Tet Westmoreland continued to believe that the whole offensive was nothing but a grand diversionary move and the real danger was to Khe Sanh, which he continued to reinforce.) So though US troops had been put on "maximum alert" after the first, January 30, attacks this order had been taken no more seriously than former false alarms: such orders were commonplace. In addition US forces tended to be based away from the cities which were never seriously considered as possible targets for attack and their defence was left to the ARVN.

The ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam —the Saigon army) forces had also been recalled on January 30 but few troops had actually returned. When the fighting broke out the rest generally preferred to stay away until they saw what was going to happen. Thus in addition to those individuals or groups who did cross over to the liberation forces there was also a large amount of unofficial desertion. The bulk of the fighting during the Tet offensive fell on the US forces as the US figures of those who died during the two months following January 31 show:

US forces	3,895
US allies	214
ARVN	4,954

(The disparity is great if it is remembered how much better supported, organised and equipped the US forces were.)

Tradition of Revolution

How should Tet be assessed? A guerrilla force attacking the cities—and so many cities at one time—is rare enough; to be apparently driven back from them is perhaps not surprising. Was Tet then really a defeat for the Vietnamese revolution as the US government claimed: that Tet showed that the people would not rise for the NLF while the losses suffered by PLAF and NLF in irreplaceable cadres and elite combatants meant that they were forced to withdraw from much of the territory which up to then had been under their effective control and made it impossible for them to launch another major offensive for some years? What were the Vietnamese Communist Party and military leadership (for revolutionary Vietnam the two have always been one) really aiming for and what did they achieve? Did they hope for a mass uprising, which did not happen, or for the crumbling away of the ARVN forces which was to happen in 1975? (And why didn't the masses rise: anti-communism? apathy? fear?) Or did the leadership face the sacrifice of large numbers of guerrillas and cadres simply in order to make a political and military demonstration of US weakness in the year of the American presidential election? How, in short, does the Tet offensive of 1968 fit into the theory and practice of the Vietnamese people's long struggle for liberation and reunification?

That the Vietnamese have had an exceptional history of liberation struggle and been able to win their victory after 30 years of post-revolutionary struggle against three major imperialist powers has a lot to do with their own history of building a nation and their two-thousand years of constant fighting for their freedom against invading armies superior in manpower and resources.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

So when the February 3, 1968 appeal of the NLF proclaimed that "the armed forces and people of the South have revived the historic days of the victories at Bach Dang, Chi Lang, Dong Da, the Nam Ky insurrection, the August Revolution, the victory of Dien Bien Phu," they were summoning up a real revolutionary and national tradition.

General Offensive and Uprising

It was the seventh plenum of the Party held in the Viet Bac maquis in 1940 which, after the collapse of the post-1936 Popular Front policies, called for a policy of supporting local armed insurrection as a prelude to a general insurrection to seize power in the whole country. The prematurely-called Nam Ky insurrection of 1940 in the South was isolated and bloodily crushed but the guerrilla units of the Bac Son insurrection in the mountainous Viet Bac in the North were preserved to form the nucleus of the "National Salvation Army" which was later, in 1944, developed by Vo Nguyen Giap, an ex-history teacher, into the "Vietnam Armed Propaganda Brigades", later to become the "Vietnam People's Army".

The Viet Bac maquis formed the springboard for the August Revolution of 1945, but the armed forces were not needed in the seizure of power. The Japanese, who had ousted the French by a *coup de main* in March, had now surrendered to the allies and in the space of one week the Vietnamese Communist Party was able to take over power throughout North and South Vietnam with overwhelming popular support. In Hue the last Emperor of Vietnam, Bao Dai, puppet of the French and the Japanese, abdicated.

After the British-backed French invasion, the first resistance war broke out, initially in the South, then over the whole country. Truong Chinh, then General Secretary of the Party, analysed the three stages of the revolution in a series or articles published in 1947.[4] After a stage of defensive war and a stage of equilibrium guerrilla warfare is gradually transformed, as attacks on enemy strongpoints become more frequent, into positional warfare. This is the last stage: the enemy's morale goes down, the French people, the people in the colonies and the world, oppose the war.

> "As for us, our consistent aim is that the whole country should rise up and go over to the offensive on all fronts, completely defeat the enemy and achieve true independence and unification. . . . *Our troops concentrate rapidly and launch lightning attacks* on the cities and the enemy positions to encircle and annihilate them. In brief, we throw all our forces throughout the country into the battle to crush the enemy completely and win back the whole of our territory! The machinery of enemy rule temporarily set up in our country is smashed to pieces by our army and people. . . . This third stage is relatively the shortest but it is also the most victorious and valiant."

The ending of the first resistance war did not follow this scenario since peace was signed after the fall of Dien Bien Phu. But it seems very similar to what happened, or failed to happen, in Tet and has often been quoted in this context.

Its Meaning

Giap never discusses these three stages of the war of liberation nor the lightning attacks on the cities as the culminating point in the war. However the phrase "general offensive and uprising" is often used by Vietnamese writers to describe Tet and I think it will be useful to discuss first what this seems to me to mean.

Firstly it is general, that is covering the whole country—not just a part. This was true, to a large extent, of earlier peasant insurrections and liberation wars and it was always a basis of the Vietnamese Communist Party's struggle as the country-wide demonstrations it organised soon after its foundation in support of the 1930-1 Nghe-Tinh Soviets show. It was a sign of the widespread support of the Vietnamese Communist Party that the 1945 August Revolution did not just happen in Hanoi or in the North but immediately extended, within a week, over the whole country. The Vietnamese Revolution, it is felt, combined workers and peasants to an extent not found in the Russian Revolution, which was mainly proletarian-based, or the Chinese Revolution, which was mainly peasant-based.

Secondly, it is offensive. "Offensive thought is the ideological basis of revolutionary strategy and war in Vietnam," wrote Giap in 1969. "An insurrection is an offensive. A revolutionary war viewed in the whole of its unfolding is an offensive. It is possible that at certain moments and in certain places one may act on the defensive but this is in order to create necessary conditions for the continuation of the offensive."

Dien Bien Phu was a French trap, to lure the Vietnamese forces to attack and then smash them with superior firepower. The Vietnamese accepted the challenge and won. How, asks Giap in the same work, do we launch an offensive against an enemy with far superior military and economic potential? By using our strong points, "the strength of an entire people rising up to defend their country, the strength of a just war in our

[4] Truong Chinh. *The Resistance Will Win.*

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

time . . . our skill in conducting people's war and ingenious forms of struggle and combat". The offensive has to bring into play all methods of struggle, "armed and political struggle, military combat and mass uprising, guerrilla and regular warfare".

The Base of the Iceberg

Thirdly, then, the general offensive is an *uprising*, and this needs more development because the lack of any insurrection in answer to the NLF call is what has been most criticised with regard to Tet and the idea of uprising is also basic to the Vietnamese concept of guerrilla war. The early name of the revolutionary armed forces, the "Armed Propaganda Brigade" stresses the inseparability of armed struggle and political struggle. The first is not possible without the other and Dien Bien Phu, just as much as Tet or the 1975 offensives, was not a purely military victory. Both Dien Bien Phu and Tet involved the participation of thousands of people, both those who fought (and the American guess of 67,000 "Viet Cong"—i.e. southerners—is not a bad uprising of those who choose hardship in the jungle rather than US aid) and those who sheltered, carried arms, ammunition and rice for several hundred miles. Tet especially, with well over 300 separate actions in every corner of a country where travel for NLF couriers or forces was difficult and dangerous, must have involved the creative initiative of a multitude of local commanders and guerrillas.

But the fact that, apart from a few marches and a certain amount of mass support, certainly, in Hue and the Delta towns, there seemed to be no popular uprising during Tet still needs to be answered. A similar question was asked of the 1975 offensive, and the answer given by Nguyen Khac Vien, director of the Hanoi Foreign Languages Publishing House, is also relevant to Tet:

> – ". . . But in the towns these popular masses apparently took little part in their own liberation, there was no insurrectionary movement.
> – "In our time you should not picture the popular movement like the marches and demonstrations of the 19th and early 20th century, mounting attacks on the organs of power. The means of repression at the disposal of the fascist regimes are nowadays so great that one would be only courting futile massacres. It is the combination of armed struggle with political struggle which decides the victory. The liberation armed forces are born from the popular masses, they were organised with the assistance of their fellow-countrymen in the North, but they could never have carried on and won the war without the support of the great popular masses. As much as the tanks and guns of the liberation forces it was the work of persuasion, agitation, education carried on for years by millions of people which brought about the disintegration of Thieu's troops. What South Vietnamese had not a brother, a friend, a cousin, a classmate or a son in the puppet army or police? And even before the liberation forces launched their attacks this work of sapping had already been done by millions of people, the liberation tanks were moving against units and garrisons which had already been worked on politically; the liberation forces took towns which were strongly defended, but they had the assistance of local combatants and militants who guided them. . . . In a word, the participation of the population was of paramount importance in winning victory."

The tanks and liberation units fighting battles, Vien goes on, are easy to see but they are the tip of the iceberg; its base is

> "the obscure, patient dangerous political work carried on by millions of people in town districts, enterprises, schools and universities, even within the army, the administration and the police of the puppet regime, that is the submerged part of the iceberg, it was difficult for a Western journalist to grasp, to study it. . . . It is not with a passive people liberated by external forces, but with the popular masses who have liberated themselves that we are now undertaking the work of normalising life. . . ."

The Tet offensive is, then, a proof of what we already know: that in a fascist country like South Africa or Chile it is impossible to win power simply by a popular uprising, by the masses marching. The popular uprising in Tet was in the fact that thousands of liberation soldiers were able to infiltrate into almost every fair-sized town in the South and no one had informed the authorities. "Simple people in the cities were building bunkers in previously secure neighbourhoods. Wealthy folk were quietly leaving town. The American advisers knew nothing. If the government officers knew anything they didn't report it."[5]

It showed also that the only way to remove physically the liberation fighters from the poorer quarters of towns was to level those quarters to the ground. It was during Tet, of the bombing of Ben Tre, that the famous comment was made by a US major: "It became necessary to destroy the town to save it."

Finally, I think, the Vietnamese concept of uprising did not only, though it did primarily, involve an uprising of the Vietnamese people (including, of course, the two hundred or so minority nationalities who live in the mountainous

[5] Don Oberdorfer, *Tet*, p. 152.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

regions). Political work had also to involve the people of the world, especially the Americans, to rise up against the policies of their governments. In our century probably no other people's struggle for liberation has involved so many in all parts of the world who felt themselves part of it.

The Protracted War and the Propitious Moment

Another relevant concept of Vietnamese military and political strategy is that of the protracted war and the propitious moment.

The August Revolution had been planned and worked for in advance, the possibility of a short period when both France and Japan would be temporarily out of action had been predicted as early as 1941, the groundwork for the revolution had been patiently laid by the Communist Party in their work in building up the Viet Bac maquis and Party cells throughout the country, and when the moment came in 1945 the Vietnamese revolutionary leadership was able to seize it. It is a guerrilla combination of being able to sit it out, to wait for ten, twenty, fifty or a hundred years if need be to liberate the country, but when the opportunity comes to be ready to strike and strike quickly.

The best example of this sudden qualitative change in the whole aspect of the war is, of course, 1975, but 1968 was a rehearsal of this.

"To Smash the Puppet Administration"

So what were the liberation forces' main aims in 1968? Unlike 1975, the Saigon army did not completely disintegrate and after 45 days of "offensive and uprising" the liberation forces temporarily withdrew. Did the liberation high command expect an uprising leading to a final victory?

I think not. Nowhere, apart from Hue, were sufficient forces moved into the cities to hold them for any length of time. Nha Trang was attacked with only 800 men, in Saigon there were many small commando attacks: 19 against the US Embassy, 13 against the presidential palace, 80 against the radio station. Meanwhile, by the end of 1967 the Americans had nearly half a million men in Vietnam and, however strong the anti-war movement in the States was growing, it was not likely they would leave in a hurry.

But also the Tet offensive was almost nowhere aimed against American installations. The attack on the US Embassy was carried out by a very small commando group and received, naturally, disproportionately large publicity. Otherwise it was almost always the Saigon installations which were attacked rather than the US bases: the US-Saigon joint command, the Saigon General Staff, the Headquarters of the Saigon Navy, Marines and Paratroops, the Command of the Saigon-Gia Dinh Special Zone, local government headquarters in the provinces, etc. The main aim seems to have been that of breaking, at least temporarily, the Saigon administrative and military machine, showing the Vietnamese people and the world that it was indeed a puppet government, a puppet army and a puppet administration, and if it were not propped up by the United States it would collapse.

This aim was effectively achieved. Story after story was filed by US newsmen after Tet to show the complete demoralisation and near collapse of the Saigon army and administration. Thieu, even after his evacuation by a US helicopter from his villa at My Tho, played a passive role; nobody heard anything of him. Lieutenant-Colonel Pham Van Khoa, head of I Corps area, hid in the roof of a hospital in Hue for the first week; when he finally escaped to the Americans he proved to be too shattered to be capable of anything. Lieutenant-General Vinh Loc, the II Corps commander, flew back to Pleiku in his personal jet but, to the fury of his US liaison officer, concentrated on the defence of his official mansion, ignoring the actions of the rest of his area. The IV Corps commander, Major-General Nguyen Van Manh, stayed at home throughout the Tet period, safe behind his tanks, troops and acres of barbed wire.[6] Everywhere the ARVN chose to bomb, rather than attacking on the ground.

Many soldiers and Saigon officials were said to have crossed over to the side of the NLF, especially in places like Hue where the liberation forces were in control for some time. In Hue the Alliance of National, Democratic and Peace Forces was founded by intellectuals and Buddhists, who left with the guerrillas for the liberated zone. "Mme Chi, formely headmistress of the respected Dong Khanh girls' school in Hue described [to Jane Fonda] the composition of the ANDPF—'the bourgeoisie, the rich,' she said. When she decided to join the revolutionary forces . . . they had to carry her in the jungle because, as a city person, she wasn't used to the harsh conditions and got sick."[7]

But perhaps more dangerous for the Saigon regime were the new NLF sympathisers who stayed behind.

Tet and the Towns

An article in *Quan Doi Nhan Dan* (People's Army) stressed the importance of the Tet offensive in carrying the revolution to the towns. "The people's war has erupted right in the towns and cities, the important rear base of the enemy which

[6] Oberdorfer, *op. cit.*

[7] Philip Braithwaite, "The PRG: what does it stand for?", quoting *Rolling Stone*, July 4, 1974.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

they always believed secure has become a front-line. . . . The nerve centre of the US aggressors and their henchmen has become a battlefield constantly besieged and threatened by the revolutionary forces and constantly in a state of confusion."

Before Tet it was possible for a Vietnamese living in Saigon or Hue to be hardly aware that the war was taking place at all. The Americans were there, true; they were a source of money, jobs, unlimited consumer goods, films, coffee bars. If you didn't go beyond the area controlled by the Saigon and US forces the war was nothing more than heavily censured reports in Saigon newspapers and even more biased shots on the government TV screens, not as exciting as the American World War II movies in the cinema. The people of the towns lived *off* the war but they did not see it. Tet forced the reality of the war home to all the people; it gave them a chance to choose, an opportunity to stand up and be counted.

The United States

So much has been written about the external face of the Tet offensive that I feel it is important to stress these internal aims. But another axiom of Giap's is that we must know our aggressors and the Vietnamese, even ordinary cadres in the commune, made a point of studying US politics. Tet was in an election year and it was, of course, timed to be in an election year. In the face of mounting opposition to the war during 1967 Johnson and Westmoreland had boasted that victory was just around the corner, the Viet Cong were being smashed and losing all support. After Tet even the most hawkish American could no longer believe that; long before Watergate, Tet destroyed the credibility of the US government. Its impact on the radical movement in the United States, in fact the part played by Tet and the Vietnam war in general in the radicalisation of large sections of the youth not only in the USA but in Europe and the rest of the world too, was enormous.

For Americans, in the summer of 1968, the war seemed all but over. On March 11, Senator McGovern, standing on an anti-war ticket, who at the beginning of the year had been lagging behind with only 8 per cent of the Democratic vote, polled 42 per cent of the votes in the New Hampshire primary, only 7 per cent behind Johnson. On March 31 Johnson went on the air to announce a limitation of the bombing of North Vietnam, eventual withdrawal of US troops and stated that he did not propose to stand for re-election. But under Nixon the war dragged on for another eight years and the US troops did not actually leave for six years. A peace agreement with the NLF and North Vietnam was not signed until a further major offensive had taken place in another US election year—an offensive which liberated some piles of rubble which had been towns.

A Great Victory

Politically everyone would agree that Tet was a great victory for the Vietnamese and that, by bringing the struggle to the towns, it succeeded in raising the war of liberation to a new stage. But was it a military defeat, causing the loss of many cadres and many of the newly-formed elite units in the army? US and Saigon figures of Viet Cong dead are always grossly exaggerated and many more civilians than the 14,300 figure they give died in the bombing of the towns and reprisals after Tet. We do not yet know the toll it really took on the NLF forces. But in assessing this aspect of Tet we should remember that the war had already gone on for 30 years and that probably the greatest loss of trained communist cadres had happened in the five years of so-called peace from 1954-9, when President Ngo Dinh Diem was breaking the terms of the 1954 Geneva Agreement by rounding up all the communist and Viet Minh cadres he could find and throwing them into prison without trial. Perhaps the figures of deaths for Tet were not so very exceptional; it was a rare party cadre in any of the occupied territories who could hope to survive for long in the 60s and early 70s. And the supposed bloodletting of the liberation forces at Tet was followed by another wave, this time of mortar attacks, on February 19, and a further offensive, possibly to coincide with the opening of the Paris peace talks, from May 5-11, with attacks on 30 towns.

Perhaps the victory of the Vietnamese people is best summed up by their greatest military strategist, Vo Nguyen Giap:

> "The great victory of the Vietnamese nation, a small nation with a not very large territory and population and with an underdeveloped economy, in its resistance against imperialist powers with great economic and military potential, with large and well-equipped armies, is an eloquent proof of the might of nations, even smaller ones in their just wars, and it has exposed the limited capabilities of big imperialist powers in their unjust wars of aggression. It is clear that *in our era even a small nation if it is united and determined, follows a correct revolutionary line, and is able to mobilise the entire people to rise up and wage war, to build and consolidate national defence, and to gain international support and assistance, such a nation is quite capable of overthrowing colonial rule and defeating the aggressive war of big imperialist powers including the leading imperialist power, the United States.*"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Journeyman Press

some new books for 1978

The Ballad of Reading Gaol
by Oscar Wilde, with woodcuts
by Frans Masereel.
Journeyman Chapbook 1, £1.20

The Overcoat by Nikolai Gogol,
translated by David Magarshack,
decorated by John E. Craig.
Journeyman Chapbook 2, £1.20

The Unquiet Death of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg by
Alvin Goldstein, introduction
by Nat Hentoff, £1.75

Freedom or Death: The Life of Gotse Delchev by Mercia
MacDermott, *about* £5.95

97 Ferme Park Road, Crouch End,
London N8 9SA

The Urban Question
A Marxist Approach
Manuel Castells
Social Structure and Social Change 1
The mushrooming cities of the third world, demolition and urban sprawl at home are located in a network of economics, social welfare and power politics. This brilliant exposition of the social, economic and symbolic terms illuminates the creation and structuring of space by action—administrative, productive and, more immediately, human.
Cloth £12 *Paper* £5.95

State and Capital
A Marxist Debate
Edited by John Holloway and Sol Picciotto
This volume of essays translated from the German is concerned with the theory of the Capitalist state and includes the major contributions to the debate on the derivation of the state. The editors introduce the methodological issues involved and provide a theoretical context for the terminology of contemporary German Marxist analysis.
Cloth £9.95 *Paper* £3.50

Edward Arnold
41 Bedford Square, London WC1B 3DP

MARXIST THEORY ● WOMEN'S LIBERATION ● POLITICAL SCIENCE ● SOVIET UNION ● MIDEAST ● LATIN AMERICA ● USA ● EUROPE ● BLACK STUDIES ● PHILOSOPHY

Write for complete catalogue to:

PATHFINDER PRESS

47 The Cut
London SE1 8LL

WORLD MARXIST REVIEW: 1978
No. 4

DISARMAMENT AND SOCIAL PROGRESS
J. Faria

CREATIVE REVOLUTIONARY APPROACH
R. Urbany

ISOLATION OF ANTI-COMMUNISM

AFRICAN PANORAMA

FASCISM IN LATIN AMERICA
J. Barrios, et. al.

Price: 35p plus postage
£4.50 for one year
from

CENTRAL BOOKS LIMITED
37 Grays Inn Road, London WC1X 8PS

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The "Prague Spring" Re-assessed

Jon Bloomfield

Of all the tumultuous events of 1968 those in Czechoslovakia had the most traumatic and deepest effect on the international communist movement, especially after the occupation of Czechoslovak territory on August 21 by Soviet and other Warsaw Pact troops. As the polemics and disputes have raged in the following decade some of the broader issues at stake in the Czechoslovak peoples' struggle for "socialism with a human face" have become clearer. The initial questions of the rights of national sovereignty, territorial independence and equality between Communist Parties have become less prominent as the focus has shifted to what kind of socialism, what role for the people and their organisations and how does the party win and exercise leadership. These issues arising from the 1968 Czechoslovak experience are obviously closely related with the considerable number of current polemics within the communist movement concerning pluralism, democracy, political power, etc. Much of the discussion around the new *British Road to Socialism* centred on these questions.

Making the Revolution

From 1945-1948 Czechoslovakia had a coalition government carrying through a far-reaching national and democratic revolution. In February 1948 flowing from a combination of international and domestic events there was a sharp political battle which resulted in the removal from the government of the main, bourgeois, pro-Western forces, the consolidation of socialist state power and the commencement of socialist economic and social planning. Throughout this period the CPCz played a prominent political role and was the main expression of working class opinion in the country. By March 1946 it had 1 million members, while in the elections in May 1946 it emerged as the largest party with 38.6 per cent of the vote.

Compared to many other countries in Eastern Europe the prospects for socialist development in Czechoslovakia were favourable. The economy was relatively well-advanced with considerable industrial capacity, especially in Bohemia and Moravia. There was a large, well-organised working class. Democratic traditions and activity—universal suffrage, trade unionism, etc.—were well-rooted in the country, unlike the pre-war situation in Hungary, Poland, Romania and elsewhere.

In the post-war years major advances were recorded. There was considerable growth and development in the economy and every citizen had the right to work. The heavy unemployment of the pre-war era was overcome. There were considerable improvements in social service provisions; for example, in education, the health service and the establishment of nurseries. These developments helped to overcome the relative backwardness of Slovakia and the uneven, lop-sided character of the economy which had existed pre-war. Slovakia's share in the creation of the national income rose from 14.2 per cent in 1948 to 24.4 in 1965. The peasantry were another sector of the people who benefited considerably from the planned economy. But the advances were not as great as hoped in the optimistic atmosphere of the immediate post-war years. Undoubtedly the rapidly deteriorating international situation was a factor here.

Any understanding of these years must be placed in this international context. Yet the limitations of this period also arose from the theory and practices of the Communist Parties concerned. The Czechoslovak Party was deeply affected by the distortions of inner-party democracy and of party-class relations characteristic of the Stalin period.[1]

Sectarian Distortions

Such factors influenced the character of the Febuary 1948 revolution and limited the active, political capacity of the working class and other sections of the people, as well as the party membership. The centralist tendencies, accentuated by the Cold War, quickly solidified into a monolith conception and practice of socialism. It was from this conception and the methods flowing from it that the main problems of the following decades originated.

In the economy the imposition of the Soviet model of extensive economic development fitted uneasily with the relatively advanced industrial character of the country. Almost everything was decided centrally and directives issued to the management in factories and enterprises.

Relations between the two nations also suffered from centralisation. Proposals to equalise relations between the two nations by making the country a

[1] For the fuller detail and documentation, see J. Bloomfield, *The Passive Revolution: Politics and the Czechoslovak Working Class 1945-1948*, especially Chapter 9 (Alison & Busby, forthcoming).

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

federal state were shelved. The subordinate political, national and cultural position occupied by Slovakia within the country was a source of friction and genuine resentment among the Slovak people.

Culture and ideology were other arenas affected by the centralisation and control of all affairs in the state by the party. A strict censorship system operated.

The key to this whole system lay in the concentration of political power in the hands of a small section of the party leadership and the state security apparatus. In this system the role of the bulk of the party, the trade unions and mass organisations of the people was reduced to the implementation of the decisions taken by the party leadership. They had no autonomous role to play and no representative method by which they could take part in the decisions or oppose those which they considered harmful. This situation inevitably bred passivity and apathy among wide sections of the people.

It also had disastrous effects inside the party. With the concentration of political power, its abuse and degeneration swiftly followed, exacerbated by the Cold War. The early 1950s saw the unjust imprisonment of hundreds of Communists, including Husák and Smrkovsky.[2] Thousands were removed from their jobs, along with many innocent, ordinary citizens, while one entirely rigged trial saw the execution of 11 Communist leaders, including Rudolf Slánsky, the general secretary, and Otto Sling, the Brno secretary.

Cementing this political system was the concentration of power in a narrow circle, with a personality cult developed first around Gottwald and then Novotny, who filled both the posts of general secretary of the party and president of the state.

The situation didn't change much after Khrushchev's revelations about the Stalin period at the 20th Congress of the CPSU. Rehabilitations of those condemned in the Slánsky trial did not come until 1963, and were then only partial. While some adjustments were made, the basic features of the administration remained unaltered. During the 1960s it became clear that this couldn't continue.

The Party Begins to Move

The December 1967 and January 1968 central committee meetings were marked by sharp debate. It took the important decision of relieving Novotny of his post as general secretary although he remained as President. His replacement was Alexander Dubcek, secretary of the Slovak party since 1963 with the advantage of being uncompromised by the illegalities of the earlier period. This change of personnel was a sign of political change. However, concern over Novotny's position and the differences within the party leadership prevented a clear initiative being given to the people on how the party was to reinvigorate the republic and its socialist political system.

Yet the removal of Novotny from one of his posts was a signal to the people. In response there was an upsurge in political interest. Demands snowballed for fuller information and a real say in running the country's affairs. The response of many party leaders was to go to the factories, packed public meetings, or on to radio and television, and speak, listen, and answer questions. A genuine dialogue was under way. Debate and controversy came out into the open and existing mass organisations, including the trade unions, began to take on a more active role. However, in this immediate post-January period there was no strategic framework for these developments to fit into. This situation was rectified by the publication of the Action Programme on April 5.

The Politics of the Action Programme

The programme represented a decisive break with the methods, practices, and ideology of the Novotny leadership. It recognised the necessity of a new set of relations between the people, the party, and the state. In doing this the programme set the framework for the renewal of Czechoslovak society with a more profound democratic and socialist orientation. Socialism would have a human face.

In the programme the major deformations of the previous period were set aside. The programme argued that the party enjoyed no automatic, divine right to lead, but constantly had to earn its leadership role. As the programme expressed it:

> "The Party cannot enforce its authority but this must be won again and again by Party activity. It cannot force its line through directives but by the work of its members, by the veracity of its ideals."[3]

A much enhanced role was envisaged for the mass organisations of the people—trade unions, works councils, youth bodies, women's organisations, etc. The programme broke with the Stalinist

[2] Husák was one of the leaders of the 1944 rising in Slovakia and was denounced as a bourgeois nationalist. Smrkovsky led the rising in Prague in May 1945 and was responsible for the people's militia in February 1948. One of the main leaders of the "Prague Spring", he also contributed to Husák's own return to political life.

[3] *The Action Programme of the CPCz.* Spokesman pamphlet No. 8, pp. 6-7.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thesis that these were just transmission belts for implementing party directives, a thesis that denied these forces any genuine, autonomous existence. As the programme put it:

> "Voluntary social organisations of the working people cannot replace political parties, but the contrary is also true: political parties in our country cannot exclude common-interest organisations of workers and other working people from directly influencing state policy, its creation and application."[4]

Further, the programme broke with the view that the socialist state was a direct instrument of the party again having no existence of its own.

A major feature of the programme was its balanced assessment of the previous two decades. Having stated the advances made it didn't shy off from self-criticism. It recognised that "suppression of the democratic rights and freedom of the people . . . appeared in the internal life of the republic" and that "the irreparable losses suffered by our movement at that time will remain for ever a warning against similar methods."[5]

This was no short-term policy programme. While it dealt with immediate issues, it set a framework for overcoming the profound political and social crisis of Czechoslovak society. It saw the Communist Party as leading the movement for the reinvigoration and strengthening of the socialist republic on the basis of its backing and support from the people. But the party was accountable to the people: it was neither their substitute nor their guardian. This was the nub of the issue.

The Inner-Party Battle

Within the party and state apparatus there were elements who resisted the Action Programme and the democratisation process. There were considerable, influential forces who "in one way or another found the deformations of the socialist reality convenient."[6] While the influence of Novotny dwindled there remained others who adhered to his politics and obstructed the process of renewal. This tension between those committed to a new way out of the crisis and those who clung to the old methods was a key feature of the period.

Despite the support which the latter received from other socialist countries, it became clear as the months went by that these forces were losing ground. The proper rehabilitation of those unjustly imprisoned in the 1950s was combined with a thorough investigation of those responsible for these illegal practices. This exposed many of Novotny's supporters. In May, Novotny himself and six colleagues were removed from the central committee in the light of their responsibility for these events and charges prepared. July saw the party hold district and regional conferences in preparation for its 14th Congress due on September 9. At these it was those associated with the line of the Action Programme who were proposed and supported for the new central committee. It was becoming clear that the congress would remove all opponents of the Action Programme from the leadership.

The Party and the People

The success of the Dubcek leadership in the inner-party battle was primarily due to the tremendous response their policy received from the mass of the people. There was a surge of popular support for the party and its leadership.

May Day demonstrations throughout the country were large and extremely enthusiastic for the new policy of the party. The respect and warmth among the people for the new party leadership, especially Dubcek and Smrkovsky, contrasted sharply with the sullenness displayed to the Novotny grouping. This was a situation that could only enhance socialist development within the country, and help remove disenchantment and disillusion that had previously existed.

Works Councils Re-emerge

A feature of the "Prague Spring" almost entirely ignored by the Western and Soviet press was the re-emergence of a works councils movement.[7] This movement began slowly but proved to be one of the most long-lasting and deeply-rooted features of the period continuing until June 1969. Works councils were given responsibility in the sphere of production in their enterprise with powers over the appointment of management and their salary; financial and investment policy; and its operation in the light of the plan. Thus this movement broke the former system of directive, one-man management and heralded an extension of industrial democracy and workers' control. The movement started slowly as initial preparatory committees were set up. By August the council movement was well under way and by January 1969 120 councils had been established representing 800,000 workers. The movement continued to grow, totalling 800 in June, when the government began to disband them.

The councils attracted a lot of interest among the workforce, with an average 83 per cent vote

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 9.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 3.
[6] *Ibid.*, p. 3.

[7] For a fuller discussion, see R. Vitak, "Workers' Control: The Czechoslovak Experience." *Socialist Register* 1971.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in elections to them in 95 councils that were surveyed. 72 per cent of council members had been employed in the enterprises for more than 10 years, while 52 per cent of them were Communists. These two figures indicate the depth of industrial and political experience which the councils enjoyed. Developments here and in the trade unions show the practical response which the "Prague Spring" drew from the Czechoslovak working class and disproves the assertion that it was only a "middle class" movement. The working class was both capable and willing to participate in the renewal of socialism.

Economic Reform

As indicated earlier, a major element of the crisis in society concerned the state of the economy. Decisions to make changes in the system of management were adopted at the 12th Party Congress in 1964 but were only partly implemented. The new economic reforms proposed by Ota Sík saw the major task as a shift from centrally planned quantity targets to quality production.

This shift in economic planning and management was a central aspect of the democratisation process occurring throughout society. For the new system to work there had to be much greater scope for the initiative of workers, scientists, technicians and managers, and more reliance on scientific research and criticism. The former administrative diktats were a fetter on the further development of the economy. Economic reforms of this type had been undertaken in several socialist countries in the 1960s following the lead of the Soviet Union with its Lieberman proposals in 1962. Undoubtedly these reforms had dangers attached to them. Too great a degree of decentralisation and market influence could undermine the overall planning mechanisms. Many would judge this to be the case in Yugoslavia and this trend is certainly evident in some of Sík's later writings. The best guarantee against these dangers was (and still is) the presence of strong, autonomous workers' organisations. Economic reform was part of the overall renewal of society. Its direction was primarily a political not a technical question. The reinvigoration of the trade unions and the re-emergence after 20 years of a works councils' movement gave workers genuine channels and organisations through which they could both express their views and check any negative developments. It was precisely their presence and activity that represented the surest safeguard against any future over-emphasis on market mechanisms and policies contrary to workers' interests. Indeed, it was workers' involvement on these issues that was one of the most distinctive features of the proposed reforms. This contrasted sharply with the situation elsewhere, a point forcibly brought home by workers' opposition in Poland in 1970 and 1976 to government economic measures introduced without any discussion. On both occasions the proposals were withdrawn after serious rioting, which had harmful political repercussions. The Czechoslovak approach offered a more fruitful path.

Handling the Media

Clearly if there was to be a thorough democratisation of society, then the strict censorship of the press and media in the Novotny period had to go. For the people and their organisations to play an active part in the renewal of socialism they had to be well informed and knowledgeable about the main policy options open to the government.

Press censorship was ended in February and in the following months debate and argument became commonplace, with radio and television also covering the main issues of the day. Publishing restrictions were lifted. Czechs and Slovaks now had the opportunity to read, listen and discuss on a well-informed basis. In this upsurge of press and literary freedom it was not surprising that some anti-socialist statements were printed or got a hearing. These were given prominence by those in the socialist countries hostile to the "Prague Spring", as well as by sections of the conservative press in the West. The Action Programme had recognised that opponents of socialism "may try to abuse the process of democratisation" but argued "that bourgeois ideology can be challenged only in open, ideological struggle before all the people".

Foreign Policy

In the field of foreign policy the basic orientation of Czechoslovakia's alliance with the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries was reaffirmed. In the press occasional voices were raised, arguing for a policy of neutrality, but there can be no doubt that the party and government wanted to preserve their existing alliances and treaty obligations. At the same time the Czechoslovak government wanted to contribute towards peaceful coexistence with the capitalist countries and open trade and economic relations with the West. In 1967 it opened trade relations with the Federal German Republic, a step that brought it into line with Hungary and Bulgaria, which had opened relations in 1964, and Poland, which had in 1963. In fact, its foreign policy was broadly similar to that of other East European socialist states.

I have outlined some of the main features of the "Prague Spring". Limited space has prevented

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a more detailed examination, but the main characteristics and dominant trend of the period is clear. The party was enjoying more popular support than at any time in the Novotny era; it was exercising genuine political and moral leadership; national divisions were being healed; and the people, especially the working class, were actively participating in the renewal of socialism.

The Political Balance

The standing and prestige of the party was confirmed by events in the weeks after the occupation. The strikes, peaceful demonstrations, refusal to feed or permit troops into barracks and statements of support from innumerable party and mass organisations and factories all bore testimony to popular backing for the government. Just two days after the occupation the Extraordinary 14th Congress of the CPCz was held in the largest Prague factory, unknown to the occupying forces. Over three-quarters of the elected delegates were able to attend. They condemned the Soviet action and wholeheartedly backed the Dubcek government and its programme.

Certainly there were those who were hostile to socialism and seeking to use the process of democratisation to undermine the socialist system. Some of these trends were evident in new organisations like KAN (The Club of Committed Non-Party Members) and K 231, a club of ex-political prisoners. Some idealist and utopian notions were also in evidence.

Yet any danger from anti-socialist forces was being easily contained. Later attempts to show the involvement of Western intelligence agencies produced extremely flimsy evidence, most of which was disproved by Czechoslovak journalists. The reality was that the party was in clear command of the situation. Not only was it coping with any possible threat from anti-socialist elements, it was also overwhelming those conservative forces in its own ranks which were hindering the process of renewal.

The Soviet Leadership's Attitude

It was this that most seriously worried the Soviet leadership. From the beginning they had been wary of the changes taking place. After April pressure from them and the other socialist countries increased. Their constant theme was that the reform movement was undermining socialism and the leading role of the party and that right-wing forces were taking control of key areas of society, especially the media, in preparation for removing Czechoslovakia from the socialist camp. These views were put by the Soviet leadership to a Czechoslovak government delegation in Moscow in early May.[8] By July their tone had become more dramatic. A letter sent from Warsaw by Soviet and four other party leaders warned that hostile forces were "creating the threat of tearing Czechoslovakia away from the Socialist Commonwealth" and made a number of demands for reversing the post-January programme. The Czechoslovak party replied by saying that conflicts had accumulated from the Novotny period and continued:

> "These conflicts cannot be satisfactorily solved suddenly in a short time. In the process of the realisation of the political line of the Action Programme of our Party it is therefore unavoidable that the wide mass stream of healthy socialist activities is accompanied by extremist tendencies, that the remnants of anti-socialist forces in our society are also trying to go along and that at the same time the dogmatic-sectarian forces connected with the faulty policy of the pre-January period are also spreading their activities."[9]

The reply highlighted the sharp difference of estimate of the political situation. The signatories of the Warsaw letter were presenting the arguments and policies of what the Czechoslovak party termed "the dogmatic-sectarian forces". These forces were securing little support in the run-up to the 14th party congress arranged for September 9.

The Soviet leadership attempted one more diplomatic initiative to stem this tide. Leaders of the Czechoslovak and Soviet Communist Parties met at the end of July at the small border town of Cierna nad Tisou. After long discussion a compromise was reached, followed at a meeting in Bratislava on August 3 between Czechoslovak leaders and those of the five signatories of the Warsaw letter with a common statement and public displays of friendship. Seventeen days later they were all a dead letter. On the night of August 20/21 600,000 mainly Soviet troops occupied Czechloslovak territory and arrested the main party and government leaders. Having failed to achieve what they wanted through discussion, the Soviet leadership was to impose its conception of socialism by force. Within the next 18 months almost the entire process of the post-January developments was dismantled and reversed.

The Occupation and National Sovereignty

The occupation of the country by Soviet and other Warsaw Pact troops was a clear violation of

[8] See Josef Smrkovsky, "An Unfinished Conversation", *Australian Left Review* pamphlet, p. 11.

[9] *Ceteka*, July 18, 1968, for the full reply of the CPCz.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the accepted principles governing relations between socialist states.[10] Indeed, the Bratislava Declaration only 17 days before had declared:

> "The participants in the conference expressed their firm resolve to do everything in their power for deepening all-round co-operation of their countries on the basis of the principles of equality, respect for sovereignty and national independence, territorial integrity, fraternal mutual assistance and solidarity."[11]

These principles had evolved gradually within the communist movement. The agreement to the independence and responsibility of each party for charting its own policy was the logical corollary to the disbanding of the Communist International. Each party had to develop its own road to socialism based on its specific, national features and their international position. The occupation of Czechoslovakia cut across those principles. The later justification by Soviet leaders in terms of "limited sovereignty" emptied the word "sovereignty" of any content and made the Soviet Union the arbiter of the policies of other parties. It has serious implications for those countries and parties in Eastern Europe wishing to develop in new directions.

Reasons for the Occupation

The weakness of the Soviet case was signified by the distortions sought to justify it. The notorious "White Book" was repudiated point by point by the Czechs. An early argument was that the troops were invited in. The Soviet representative at the United Nations declared:

> "The armed units of the socialist countries, as is well-known, entered the territory of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic on the request of the government of that state."[12]

He repeated this assertion when questioned by British and US representatives. This line was quickly dropped and to this day no names of any party or government leaders who issued an "invitation" have been published. *Pravda* asserted that things were leading towards an open counter-revolutionary coup attempt", that Dubcek and his colleagues were "conniving at counter-revolution" and were in alliance with forces which "had connections with foreign intelligence".[13] No evidence was brought forward to support these charges.

What was really at stake was not a return to capitalism but a different kind of socialism. The CPCz was determinedly set on its new course. Its forthcoming congress was about to confirm this and remove those in the leadership opposing the development. It was clear that a new model of socialism, distinct from that of the Soviet Union, was emerging rapidly. This was the primary concern of the Soviet leadership. Further, there was no reason to believe that the appeal of the "Prague Spring" would remain solely a Czechoslovak affair. With their own supporters in the CPCz leadership about to be defeated at the 14th Congress the Soviet leadership decided to move to nip the new movement in the bud.

It was in their relations with the Soviet Union that the Dubcek leadership showed their historic blindspot. They failed to appreciate the depth of opposition to what they were doing and the lengths to which the Soviet leadership would go to prevent the implementation of the CPCz's new policy. Clarity came later as Smrkovsky wrote in his memoirs:

> "Today I see clearly that it wasn't a matter of concrete items, but of our whole political concept. That was the reason for all that went on. But it would be difficult to stand up and say: we are against democratisation of the social order, we are against humanism, we are against modernising the running of the socialist state. They couldn't do that. But that was the real issue."[14]

"Normalisation"

So great was the unity and support of the Czech and Slovak people for the Dubcek government that initial Soviet plans for an instant reversal of the post-January process were checked. At discussions in Moscow a few days after the occupation the Soviet leadership formally agreed to the continuation of the post-January policy in broad outline. Already, however, conditions were placed on the action of the government and certain personnel were removed. Over the next year the logic of military occupation took its toll, accelerating after April 1969 when Dubcek was removed from office. Thousands loyal to the "Prague Spring" lost their jobs; workers' and other mass organisations were curtailed and, in the case of the works councils, closed down; the party was purged of half a million members; and in 1971 the 14th Party Congress was held denouncing the opportunism

[10] See especially the statement of the Soviet government, October 30, 1956; the declaration of the 1957 World Conference of Communist and Workers' Parties; and the 1960 declaration of the 81 parties at the World Conference.

[11] Quoted in *Comment*, September 21, 1968.

[12] See verbatim record of the 441st meeting of the UN Security Council, August 21, 1968.

[13] *Pravda*, August 22, 1968.

[14] Smrkovsky, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and revisionism of the post-January period. In classic manner it scrubbed from history the Extraordinary 14th Congress of August 1968. With the "new" congress the "normalisation" process was complete.

Czechoslovakia and the International Communist Movement

However, the tensions and contradictions within Czechoslovak society remain. So do the differences within the international communist movement, which have extended in scope well beyond Czechoslovakia in the following decade. The taproot of many present controversies over democracy, pluralism, how a communist party leads, etc., is found in the divergent responses to the "Prague Spring" and the Action Programme. Those eight months in 1968 helped clarify the thinking and policy of many Communists on the lessons of the Stalin era and how socialism could only be won and developed on the widest possible extension of democratic rights and powers in the hands of the people.

This period also changed relations between the CPSU and those Communist parties which disapproved of the occupation. The firm opposition of these parties, including the French, Italian and Japanese as well as the British, gave real substance to the previous communist declarations of each party's independence and autonomy. More than any other episode Czechoslovakia gave concrete expression to this autonomy. No longer could the CPSU rely on the automatic support of these parties for its main policies. The following decade has seen this fact brought home very clearly. The diversity of the international communist movement has become a reality. Inside the British Communist Party a lengthy battle was waged against those who resisted these changes. Yet the executive committee's position of opposition to the actions of the Soviet Union and four other socialist countries was endorsed by a 3 to 1 majority at its 1969 Congress. Since then there have been several EC statements on the Czechoslovak situation. On Charter 77 the party expressed its "serious concern" at the harassment of signatories of the document, stated that "the present events have their origins in the military intervention" and that this "military intervention did not, and could not, resolve the political problems, arising from the distortions of socialism and departures from socialist legality prior to 1968, which the Czechoslovak people were attempting to grapple with".[15] The firm stand taken by the party on this issue closely relates to the conception of socialism and strategy for achieving it, clearly expressed in *The British Road to Socialism* and which received overwhelming approval at the 35th Congress last November.

Conclusion

That strategy depends for its success above all on the actions of the people. This is why 1968 is such an inspiring year for everyone eager for major social change. 1968 reaffirmed the validity of the Marxist maxim that it is the masses who make history. The tide of national liberation throughout the Third World drew strength from the Vietnamese; the French May signalled a new combativeness among the working class; and in Czechoslovakia there arose the popular movement for genuine, far-reaching democratisation and reinvigoration of a socialist society.

That movement also had leaders of real stature who refused to buckle under pressure. Seven years later Alexander Dubcek's "Open Letter" to his own and other parties was to illustrate that stature with a staunch defence of the whole post-January development and a fierce rebuttal of government attempts to vilify and distort it. The absence of a recantation suggested that he at least had learned one lesson from his country's history.

Others remain too. Gustav Husák now ignores the words he spoke at the National Assembly on August 27, 1968, when, speaking of the post-January period, he said: ". . . we shall not relinquish anything in this great struggle for a new content to socialist democracy."[16] Yet many continue that struggle, while the whole period stands out as a beacon, as proof of the capacity for renewal within the socialist countries, as proof of the possibility of a different kind of socialism from that already existing. As such the "Prague Spring" is not only a part of the socialist heritage and struggle of the Czechoslovak people: it inspires communists, socialists, and all democratic forces in the West fighting to overthrow capitalism and bring about a democratic, socialist system of society.

[15] *Comment*, February 5, 1977.

[16] Husák. *Speech to the National Assembly*, August 27, 1968.

MARXISM TODAY
can be obtained
ON SUBSCRIPTION
£4.50 for one year UK and Eire
£5.25 for one year Abroad
From
CENTRAL BOOKS LTD.
37 Grays Inn Road, London WC1X 8PS

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

TAVISTOCK

DICTATORSHIP AND POLITICAL DISSENT

Workers and Students in Franco's Spain

JOSÉ MARAVALL

Tavistock Studies in Sociology

During nearly four decades of Francoism, subversive political groups survived, developed and flourished in Spain. This book studies the resistance of the Spanish working-class and student movements to this dictatorship and interprets it from three perspectives: the social and political tensions that arose between the institutions of the dictatorship and a process of rapid capitalist development; the persistance of traditions of political militancy in certain parts of Spanish society; and the survival and re-emergence of underground political organizations - mainly socialist and Communist.

11 May 1978 Hardback

0 422 76160 5 £7.95

Chapman & Hall

SMITH, MARX AND AFTER

Ten Essays in the Development of Economic Thought

R L MEEK

Ten essays on different aspects of an important tradition in economic thought – a tradition which began with Adam Smith, was developed by Ricardo and Marx and in our own time by Piero Sraffa and the 'Neo-Ricardians'.

Part One deals with the problem of Smith's relation to Marx; Part Two discusses Marx's theory of value and distribution and particular emphasis is given to the 'transformation problem' around which so many modern debates are centred; Part 3 considers modern economics, discussing some of its links with the past and prospects for the future.

1977 Hardback

0 412 14360 7 £8.00

The above prices are net in the UK only

Tavistock, Chapman & Hall
Divisions of Associated Book Publishers Ltd
11 New Fetter Lane, London EC4P 4EE

Specialist Tours to the USSR

"Country Standard" tour to Moscow, Kiev and Kharkov. 27th May—10th June

Full sightseeing programme in all centres, including visits to state farms, agricultural machinery factories and meetings with trade unionists. Fully inclusive £225.

Soviet Sports Tour. Moscow, Minsk and Leningrad. 26th August—8th September

This pre-Olympic tour includes visits to sports stadiums, football, gymnastics and athletic clubs, a sports boarding school and general sightseeing in all centres. Inclusive price £238.

Russian Language Courses to the USSR

Three and four weeks courses with daily tuition. Sightseeing and cultural visits, full board, accommodation and all travel.
Still some vacancies on courses at Moscow/Dyuny, Leningrad/Dyuny and Krasnodar. Fully inclusive prices from £332.

Summer Tours to the GDR

Trade Union Friendship Holidays
Fifteen day tours throughout the Summer to the Baltic Coast, Thueringian Forest, Saxon Switzerland and other centres. Full board, accommodation, sightseeing, scheduled air travel. All tours include 2 days in Berlin. Only £174.

GDR Youth Tour. 19th July—2nd August

Visiting Berlin and the new Youth Holiday Centre on the Scharmuetzel Lake. Fully inclusive £145.

German Language Course to Berlin and Dresden. 2nd—23rd August

Intensive tuition, return air travel, full board, cultural visits and sightseeing. Inclusive price £228.

Inclusive tours to all countries organised for trade unionists, students, teachers and other groups of 15 people or more.

Progressive Tours Ltd.

**12 Porchester Place, Marble Arch,
London W2 2BS.
Tel. 01-262 1676. Telex 25135**

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Cultural Conflict and Political Advance in Britain

David Triesman

It is necessary, by way of introduction, to give some account of the development of the conditions in which the 1960s were formed. The post-war economic boom is often said to have heralded a time of stability in British economics and politics which stands in stark contrast to the pre-war depression. The extent of economic privation among the employed, and destitution among the huge pool of unemployed which formed the social background of the parents of the post-war generation was not repeated. Within a few years of the end of the war, any destabilising remnants of the European and British fascist movements were swept away by renewed economic stability, bolstered by the Welfare State provisions.

It is, under these circumstances, to be expected that a ruling class with a predilection for publicising the stability of its order should have flaunted the accomplishment of growth by minor reform. Even the political institutions reflected this unchangeability in British social life with the Tories remaining in power for 13 unbroken years. But most important, for the post-war generation, without the experience of depression, fascism and war to reflect on, the 13 years were increasingly seen as an oppressive miasma, where "stability" took on all the appearance of stagnation. The immediate prospect, in the early 1960s, was the replacement of the Conservative with a Labour Government. In view of the state of the labour movement as a whole in the early 60s, it was sanguine to believe that either of its two wings—the Labour Party or the TUC—was about to depart from deeply entrenched reformism. The belief was fostered that Wilson, the man who had resigned with Aneurin Bevan and had later eclipsed George Brown and James Callaghan for the leadership, signalled a decisive shift to the left by the Parliamentary party. The failures of the 1964-66 government were readily excused on the basis of its tiny majority, but the excuses wore thin after 1966, and illusions evaporated that any fundamental shift in the distribution of wealth or in British compliance with American imperial aims was to take place. Wilson's place in the Labour right was made crystal-clear at the time of the seamen's strike.

In the other wing, the TUC leadership had shown similar reformist political tendencies under a succession of post-war general secretaries. Vincent Tewson, George Woodcock and Vic Feather had all managed to disapprove of, but acquiesce in, Conservative economic policies of pay pause and under-investment. At the election of the Wilson Government, the policy of income restraint (now in order to secure an acceptable balance of payments and defend the exchange rate of the pound) was accepted more full-heartedly.

Bourgeois Culture and Ideology

The argument has been expressed in the pages of *Marxism Today* and elsewhere that the final and decisive form of control exercised by a ruling class is embodied in its economic power and control over the mechanisms of production and distribution. It is the decisive sphere for class struggle in, as Louis Althusser puts it, "the final instance". The mechanism of last resort for the ruling class for retaining power is the force of the state, the authorised and legitimated use of naked coercion.

Yet it is clear that the ruling class in Britain does not frequently resort to coercion. It has no need to do so. It is unnecessary to coerce those who accept class rule more or less willingly. Given that the British population is not often in a state of revolt, it is clear that the rule of capitalism is, in general, maintained with the consent of the mass of people to the institutions of economic, political and ideological rule.

Indeed, it is the very "normality" or "naturalness" which people ascribe to the order of society that is its greatest protection. The culture of a society carries this message of "normality". The ruling culture is the set of beliefs, ideas and institutional ways of doing things, that permeate an entire social formation, as they relate to fundamental concepts held about humans and their societies.

Because of the focus in culture on humans and human societies, the range of disciplines which enable the study of cultural phenomena and which help protect and modify the ruling culture are, particularly, aesthetics, anthropology, economics, history, philosophy, political science, psychoanalysis, psychology and sociology. These disciplines have a contradictory character for they are, at the same moment, the intellectual bastions of

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ruling class culture and most likely to experience strains and schisms within it. Hence, at two levels, in the "common sense" understandings of ordinary discourse, and in the discourse of the "human sciences", the culture of a ruling class is produced, disseminated and refurbished. It has, when that ruling class is the emergent, revolutionary class, when its ideas are in the ascendant, a degree of coherence in whichever sphere it is encountered—in its philosophy, theology, literature, etc.

Such a complex, cultural totality begins to fragment when aspects of it, in an uneven cadence, begin to lack credibility in providing single, unchallenged explanations. At such junctures, what was a coherent world view starts to degenerate into a series of disconnected "ideologies". Each is incomplete in itself, at odds with others. A ruling class will attempt to maintain the fabric of its world view as a whole; subordinate classes will experience it as an ill-assorted set of disintegrating ideological postures.

Throughout the period 1955-64, we find a portrayal of British life, economic and cultural, reflected in Macmillan's slogan: "You've never had it so good." Those who never had it at all were socially "invisible" in the official ideology. In the human sciences, the message was essentially the same. British sociology, for example, plumped for the American view that class conflict had come to an end and that the erstwhile "working class" had been smoothly absorbed into the "middle class"—a process labelled "bourgeoisification". Ideology (meaning the realm of conflicting social ideas) was declared dead, and the capitalist heartlands were discovered to have become "post-capitalist", or "post-industrial".

Conflict in the Political and Economic Formation

No sooner had the last rites been intoned over ideological conflict than the corpse exhumed itself. The new front opened in the sphere of ideological struggle and conflicts in the political and economic spheres should not be overestimated.

Mass working-class organisations, unable to shake off right-wing social democratic bureaucracies, developed the tendency for rank-and-file trade unionists to take unofficial action. The emergence of the "wild-cat strike" became a matter of expressed concern to the incoming Labour Government of 1964. A renewed spector of militancy had the effects of unsettling the right in the largest unions, paving the way for the elections of Jack Jones and Hugh Scanlon, and of informing a new generation of workers and students that there were other tactical options. In addition, following the merger of ASSET and ASeW to form ASTMS, a new dimension of organised militancy appeared in sections of the workforce. In other industries, there was a gradual, and largely hidden, development of militancy.[1]

The flow of, mainly, young people into protest movements also signalled a change. CND, and its more dynamic wings, the YCND and the Committee of 100, brought many young, middle-class people into contact with forms of direct action.

The Emergence of Pop Culture

Of particular significance in the post-war years was the emergence of cultural forms which demonstrated distance from the dominant, complacent culture. If the mechanism of compliance and consent to bourgeois order is its normal and preferred means of rule, then the progressive fracturing of a dominant culture will have far-reaching consequences.

The cultural forms which emerged in the mid-50s, vehemently in the United States and later in Britain, contrasted sharply with the cultural passivity and austere drabness of pre-war taste.

Pop culture, an admixture of a number of elements, was forged in opposition. It spread first in music as the widely available medium of the record extended. Music incorporated a fusion of cultural expressions from a number of oppressed groups—the Southern US blacks, the poor whites, the Detroit black ghetto proletarians, and others. It fused R&B and jazz, seized the progressive moment of folk music, and generated rock, the most violent and least controlled expression of anger and cynicism, of relish for pop culture itself, and sexuality.

The post-war generation, moreover, was numerically and as a proportion of the total population far larger than comparable groups before the war. Successive Annual Abstracts of Statistics show a burgeoning of 16-20-year-olds, economically active in ways unthinkable in pre-war austerity. Thus the tastes, and the capability to indulge them, of the population who were teenagers in the 60s, had an impact throughout the cultural order. It can be seen in music and dance, in graphics and design (a field galvanised by the record business itself: contrast a record sleeve of 1955 vintage with one from 10 years later), in media, especially television, where shows like *That Was the Week That Was* ousted *The Billy Cotton Band Show* from the Saturday evening peak. It had impact in film, ushering in explicitly political film-makers. It produced its own literature, papers like IT and Oz.

The movement of the urban young and disenchanted peaked in 1967. Massive music and psychedelic festivals, from Hyde Park to the

[1] J. Hughes, "The Rise of the Militants", *Trade Union Affairs*, No. 1, Winter 1960.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Golden Gate Park in San Francisco, made almost messianic claims for a new order symbolised by flowers and mysticism. It was, of course, no such thing. It could be no substitute for a movement among all progressive forces for control of the mechanisms of power. It had, however, cracked the "normal" order of ruling culture and had created a sphere of protest that could be entered by younger members of all classes.

No development of this kind can take place without capitalism attempting to both subvert and profit by it. Pop culture was, given the potential for spending enjoyed by many young people, particularly open to profiteering.

Nor was the content of all the music or artifacts particularly progressive. It was clearly outright reaction in most of what it said about women, and decidedly tentative on questions of socialist activism.

But the balance of the cultural revolt, which had impact on all sections of British society, has to be seen as having a progressive character. It released many new and democratically-inclined forces from the cell blocks of bourgeois conventionality.

Specific Conditions Affecting Students

While all young people were subject to the effects of the contradictions discussed, these were insufficient to foster open revolt, except among students, where the contradictions became, for a brief period, what Althusser calls "overdetermined". For them contradictions reached a state of heightened tension in the economic, political and ideological spheres at the same moment, and each of these spheres then reverberated on the others. Overdetermination occurred because, although contradictions in the economic (mode of production) are the ultimate location at which bourgeois rule is breached, at various moments, contradictions on other levels of the social structure may be temporarily more crucial.

In the period from the return of the Churchill Government to the events of 1967/68 there are strong grounds for arguing that ideological contradictions were dominant. Under those circumstances, students come to have an atypically important role. Within higher education, ideology is at the centre of the conflict.

Student numbers in higher education increased dramatically in the 1950s and 60s. In 1962-63, the number of full-time students stood at 217,000, and by 1967-68 it had risen to 376,000. The growth in five years outstripped the previous 25, because of growth in population in the relevant age-group (bulge) and the demands made for more trained personnel ("trend"). Indeed, compared with 1900, nearly eight times as many of the people between 19 and 22 were in full-time study.

The twin consequences of the growth were that students ceased to be such an exclusive social group as the proportion of them from working-class backgrounds increased to about 25 per cent, and, because they were increasingly numerous, they became a socially identifiable group in themselves.

Of greater significance was the reason they were being brought into tertiary education. The development of the economic system makes changing demands on the education institutions. The types of personnel that were needed at different stages in capitalist production had changed. It required more specialised technicians in production and personnel to organise consumption and political consent.

Equally the institutions which were responsible for carrying through this change were ill-prepared to do so. They were notoriously slow to recognise the necessity for producing technological labour, and relevant studies developed only slowly in academic centres, at a rate which did not compare with industrialised competitors.[2]

Material Factors

These developments in higher education had specific material outcomes, the ingredients of the gunpowder that ignited in 1967 and exploded in 1968.

1. The demand for representation in the authoritative councils of academic institutions became increasingly pressing. The demand, rejected, highlighted the necessity for more democratic forums. Awareness of the need for more representative democracy led to recognition that there were comparable struggles in all walks of life.

2. The reaction to this of outraged governing bodies was to invoke "College-Law" by which students are subject to dual penalty, from the civil courts and their own college; and also to reinforce the *in loco parentis* mechanism, where a college controls student social life in the manner of an irate Victorian father on matters of personal and sexual conduct. The methods were indiscriminate, pulling many non-militant students into the draconian net. Finally they became intolerable.

3. Students had increasingly inadequate incomes. Many lived on £6 per week. The belief grew that campaigns on this front must be laid at the door of the state.

4. The "binary" split between wealthier universities and the poorer local authority college sector. This imposition of class relations on higher education became a sharply contested issue throughout 1967.

---

[2] B. Simon, *Studies in the History of Education* (1967).

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

5. The final area of disputes developed over the content of curricula. This area came under increasing pressure as students in the social sciences complained of the monolithic view entrenched in their disciplines. Among students, the gap left by the absence of Marxism from social science courses could not go unchallenged and many Marxist academics took part in this thrust.

Methods of Struggle

To locate battlefields is not to engage in battle. There was little experience among any group of young people about what could or should be done. The most obvious arena for conducting any kind of struggle appeared to be the NUS.

The National Union of Students

Formed in 1922 by a group of student societies, the NUS had advanced to a membership of 336,000 in 1967. If eligible, it would have been the sixth largest union in the TUC. Why did it not seem an appropriate vehicle for student mobilisation in 1967-68?

Constitutionally, while it could discuss education and welfare of students, political debate was prohibited, either domestic or international, unless they could be smuggled in under a spurious educational umbrella. Thus, opposition to apartheid in education could be voiced, but condemnation of the Sharpville massacre could not. Moreover, the NUS was explicitly aligned with the imperialist International Student Conference, a body funded by the CIA through dummy "charities".

The likelihood of overcoming these organisational and ideological rigidities seemed small in 1967, the Constitution guaranteeing election for complete right-wing slates, and a reservoir of jaundice accumulated about what could be achieved through NUS channels, a view which proved graphically mistaken.

"Radical" and "Revolutionary" Student Politics

Student revolt gathered momentum in a whole range of countries from the mid-60s onwards. The virus of mass student activism, outside the channels of the NUS and the political parties, began to infect Britain a little later. In October 1966, the LSE Socialist Society, one of several that was growing rapidly in membership and authority, published a critique of new LSE Director, Walter Adams, who had just returned from heading the University of Rhodesia. Activism spread to a number of campuses raising the issue of British investment in South Africa and a variety of questions about student income, fees, housing and college democracy.

However, at this stage, two coexisting streams formed. The first was based on essentially spontaneous activism on each campus growing from the work of broad socialist societies. It contained an amalgam of rapidly digested continental Marxism, much of it gleaned from the pages of *New Left Review*, and the flourishing pop culture of which students were a part.

If the second stream lacked the panache, it contained a good deal more organisational seriousness. To co-ordinate a transformation of the NUS, students from the Communist Party (whose initiative it was), the National Association of Labour Students, the Union of Liberal Students and some independent socialists, grouped together to form the Radical Student Alliance. It was launched on a safe, but pertinent, manifesto which opposed the binary system and the means test, called for larger salaries for teachers and grants for students, and supported the struggles of students and others in the international field. It also sought major reforms within the NUS itself, and achieved substantial mobilisations on questions like overseas students' fees where the NUS leadership failed miserably.

While relatively pallid by the standards of one year later, it was a development of strategic significance. It was the first major organisational effort of militant students, and it was directed at a level of demands which commanded the kind of mass support which the right-wing leadership could not, and which, in the end, disposed of that leadership. It was also the progenitor of the broad left in the NUS despite the fact that many of the original activists lacked patience to be present when that broad left triumphed in the NUS. On matters of cultural and ideological struggle, the RSA had very little to say.

Communist Students in 1967-68

The events of the previous years had an unquestionable effect on Communist students, inevitably caught within the same train of experiences. The Party Student Committee as publicly presented was gravely suspicious of the libertarian and utopian aspects of what was taking place. Jack Woddis,[3] reflected that view, for example, confirming that many of the forms of student activism were dangerous and unacceptable. He was, in part, quite right, but accounts given of the causes of the unacceptable activism were couched in non-theoretical terms: the phenomenon resulted from an increased moral concern, natural on the part of young people. The task was to convert this concern into mass, organised support for socialist politics.

[3] J. Woddis, *Comment*, February 15, 1969.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

As an orientating mechanism, the patient building of broad groupings had merit and some success —at Manchester and Hornsey College of Art. But it could also be tailist, failing on occasions to see the positive aspect of some of the sharper movements that could be easily dismissed as "infantile", and preferring to wait for larger but more limited developments. In part, these missed opportunities were a result of an exaggerated assessment of the influence of the ultra-left and, most important, an inadequate recognition of the extent of the fracture within the fabric of bourgeois culture.

In the development of the RSA there was also a tendency among party student organisers to view the organisation as, essentially, an electoral machine within the NUS. Thus its organisational capacities were honed at the expense of its role in political development of broad democratic forces. While this had importance in the construction of the broad left—perhaps the most enduring accomplishment—it also left it bereft of substantial analysis of the mass cultural struggle.

Indeed, it was in this sphere that the major flaw in strategic conception occurred. Students were portrayed as simply another element in the class struggle, indeed, as part of the oppressed class (a view held in common, ironically, with the International Socialists), and as such they had no special role. That reflected a serious underestimation of the role of ideology and of cultural struggle. It prioritises the final and determinant contradiction, undervaluing the dominant one at that moment. Thus it diminished to insignificance the role that could be played by revolutionary intellectuals; it assigned them no special task based on objective analysis of their distinct location.

However, if the principal tendency among party students, it was not the only one. Others placed a far higher estimate on the role of cultural struggle, both because it seized on a weakness within capitalism that was manifestly growing rapidly, and because as that breach opened it was filled by newly-emerged democratic forces. Within this tendency, which has, subsequently, assisted substantial re-evaluations of Communist strategic thinking, there was a clear acceptance of the proposition in both Lenin and Gramsci that in a pre-revolutionary period the energies of all potentially revolutionary forces must be engaged, developed and co-ordinated.[4] It should be added, indeed, that the development of this line of thinking and work has since enabled Communist students to be successful on a whole range of fronts—from the NUS to the enormous growth of the CUL.

[4] Lenin raises this question in relation to student struggles in "The Student Movement and the Present Political Situation", *Collected Works*, Vol. 15, 213 (1963). But also see K. Marx, "General Rules of the Working Men's Association", 1871, *Selected Works*, Vol. 1. 386.

1968

I have argued that the preconditions for a significant revolt among many young people, and particularly among students, were accruing before the start of 1968, in the material conditions of Britain, and more significantly within the fissures in the dam of bourgeois conventionality. It remains to specify the proximate and detonating factors that produced a year of continuous unrest and revolt.

These precipitating factors cannot be found in the activism of the mass organisations of the working class, not because there were no issues, but because of the anaesthetising effect of the defeats imposed by Wilson's defence of the pound. Despite large public expenditure cuts, the reintroduction of prescription charges, cuts in housebuilding and wage restraint the response was, at most, muted, and engaged no mass forces.

That is not to say that there was no response from sections within the working class that year. The Barbican building workers, led by Lou Lewis, fought an epic battle in the City of London, and the activity of the Liaison Committee began to increase as rumour of the forthcoming content of Barbara Castle's *In Place of Strife* circulated. But for the mass working-class organisations, and for much of the organised British left, it was not a vibrant year.

News From Afar

During 1968, and providing a completely fresh vista (revealing what Sartre called "the horizons of the possible"), there was daily evidence of revolutionary progress in some part of the world.

The reports of the Tet offensive had a powerful effect on British campuses, where meetings called by local groups of the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign with national speakers could assemble 1,000 students within hours. The intense debate inevitably spilt on to the streets, where, aside from dozens of local demonstrations, there were two significant mass demonstrations. On March 17, some 30,000 confronted police horses and drawn batons in Grosvenor Square in front of the fortress US Embassy. That night, 246 demonstrators were in police cells, and 117 policemen in London hospitals. On October 27, over 100,000 marched peacefully through London, avoiding the embassy. The media warned of impending revolution. The National Gallery was boarded up, but the LSE Director's similar effort to close his institution failed as 1,000 occupied it.

News arrived of insurgency in West Bengal,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Yemen and Bolivia, of resistance in Greece, Rhodesia and South Africa, of profound social upheavals in China and Czechoslovakia. Student papers accorded such news pride of place over many domestic issues. At its peak, in May, the student revolt was experienced as being linked through a world-wide community of interests reaching through Berkeley, Columbia, the Sorbonne and Nanterre, the Charles University in Prague and the Free University of Berlin, to London and Colchester. Paris was, of course, the centre of the movement. Among British students it appeared that a naive and inexperienced student group—the *enrages* of Nanterre—had managed in a mere two weeks to close the Sorbonne, barricade the Latin Quarter to the CRS, seize the Odéôn proclaiming it a venue for political debate and a "festival of the oppressed", and finally to have instigated a temporary alliance with workers that resulted in a General Strike.

French students, it was concluded, had found an insurrectionary formula. In Britain, occupations and demonstrations around every conceivable goal were initiated, in the hope of both altering the conditions that were the subject of protest and in the pious, moralistic hope that working-class militants might flow into what were conceived of, it is sad to recall, as new strategic breaches.

The Tactics of 1968 and the Absent Strategy

It would be unhelpful to catalogue the minutiae of tactical considerations of the student movement in that year, despite the sizeable mobilisations that were achieved. There were a number of tendencies, including the following three. First, the various Trotskyist groups proceeded on the basis of posing "transitional demands"—that obscure calculus by which an attempt is made to compute a level of unobtainable demands which are, in themselves, of small significance, but which win the allegiance of uncommitted groups. The authorities would react to the demands in an oppressive fashion, thus teaching these new-won adherents that it is only in alliance with other forces, experiencing the same repression, that victory can be achieved.

Second, various libertarian groups turned to Herbert Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man* and *Critique of Pure Tolerance,* using the concept of "repressive tolerance" by which the ruling class manipulates all other classes. By allowing a facsimile of "pluralist" democracy to operate in traditional political institutions, consciousness of repression and revolt are kept within manageable limits. Only in its relations with the Third World, and with those who challenge its rule at home, does the mask of tolerance slip to reveal the skull of repression. Students, according to this theory, had a particular, vanguard role, shared with ghetto blacks, various lumpen elements and the freedom fighters of the Third World. They would strip away the mask and the full weight of repression would reawaken an enervated working class.

Finally, heavily influenced by Debray's account of the Latin American movement, there developed a different kind of vanguard theory—"Guevarism"—which was expressed in Britain as "Red Base" theory. It prioritised student political revolt because it argued trainee intellectuals were in a position to dramatically increase the meagre Marxist intellectual tradition. This would be accomplished if schools of thought normally excluded from campuses could be brought into contention. A salient would be opened in the intellectual world to develop essential "revolutionary theory", the precondition specified by Lenin for "revolutionary practice". The Guevarist element is not that a vanguard will start an insurrection to expose the repressive nature of the state, but that it creates in a prerevolutionary period the political conditions in which the masses can take major steps.

The unlikely (and unworkable) combination of these three strands, and their tributaries, came togther in the Revolutionary Socialist Student Federation, where the time of all participants was consumed in outmanoeuvring one another, and driving out as heretical anyone who could not stomach massive doses of banal sectarianism in the daily diet.

Gains and Losses

Despite the obvious weaknesses of what happened in 1968, a number of gains for the progressive movement as a whole can be charted back to that moment.

1. Fracture of the Middle Strata

A process which had been signalled by the pop cultural revolt proceeded to the point at which major fissures opened in bourgeois culture, and the effects of this disintegration have been seen most clearly among the class of 1968. Capitalist societies, with their insatiable requirement for intellectual workers, produced both groups that would perform the necessary functions and those who have bent their energies to destroying them. They are not distinct camps, but on the continuum between the two there have been sizeable groups pulled towards the left throughout the 70s, further rupturing the "total" character of the bourgeois world view. And it is, in general, correct to think in terms of groups rather than reclaimable individuals. In the walks of life into which the graduates of the late 60s went, they formed radical and protest wings, coalesced around radical journals, and conducted running diatribes with the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

accepted wisdoms in each of these fields. There are, now, radical social workers, vets, statisticians, psychiatrists, psychologists, doctors, teachers, and so on.

2. The Advance of Theory

Lip-service to the necessity for Marxist theoretical work is not uncommon. Thus theory suffers doubly. Few have the time to prioritise it and that amplifies its traditional absence from British political culture. In the period leading to 1968, and receiving a massive boost that year, the upturn in the publication, purchase and reading of Marxist literature has been remarkable. Alongside new work, texts untranslated or long out of print have flooded journals and bookshops. There is scarcely a field of substance which has not received extensive and serious treatment by Marxists. College and university courses, and the growth of size and diversity of studies in the Communist University over successive years, attest to both a general flowering of political culture and a recognition of its specific importance.

3. The Battle with Bourgeois Culture

The recognition that bourgeois culture and ideology was a specific "enemy" grew and formed a basis for many developments in the progressive movement. These constituents of the armoury of the ruling class were seen to require special analysis in Marx's own work (*The German Ideology*), but the extent of their impact on the lives of members of all classes has received remarkably scant attention.

Throughout 1968, the assorted impact of libertarian concerns with life-style politics, and the use of Gramsci's concept of "hegemony", the ideological and cultural acquisition of consent by the ruling class, suggested that there was a tangible connection between the way life is lived and the ideas that underlie the system, and that this connection was a location for political intervention. A search developed over the next decade into the "private" areas of life to discover the forms of political culture that are reproduced in those areas.

The first issue explored in this light was racism, the overt and covert mechanisms by which black people are excluded from opportunity or participation in most social and political arenas.

It could not, under the circumstances, take long before other groups, systematically discriminated against materially and ideologically, raised similar questions about their own oppression. By late 1968, many feminists had appeared within the student movement, and in the years which followed they took up, with other women, the struggle against sexist culture, and, inevitably, the sexism of the men in the movement.

4. Political Training

The movement through the mid-60s and in its diverse forms in the 1970s produced an opportunity which was quite atypical for young people. It allowed a large number of them, at a relatively tender age, to take part in a mass political movement and fill its leading positions. People who might otherwise have waited for equivalent opportunities until their middle age found themselves learning the technical aspects of organisation and propaganda, public speaking, running offices, printing and distributing, manufacturing posters and repairing public address systems.

Thus, the epoch of 1968 called into being and revealed new progressive forces, with a style characterised by mass participation, by democratic forms of conduct, by exploration of dissent in fields formerly safe for bourgeois order, by recognition of the depth to which bourgeois culture and ideas permeate all institutions, whether public or "personal", by combativeness and by a degree of organisational experience. Those new forces are now widely accepted as necessary to revolutionary progress.

Conclusion

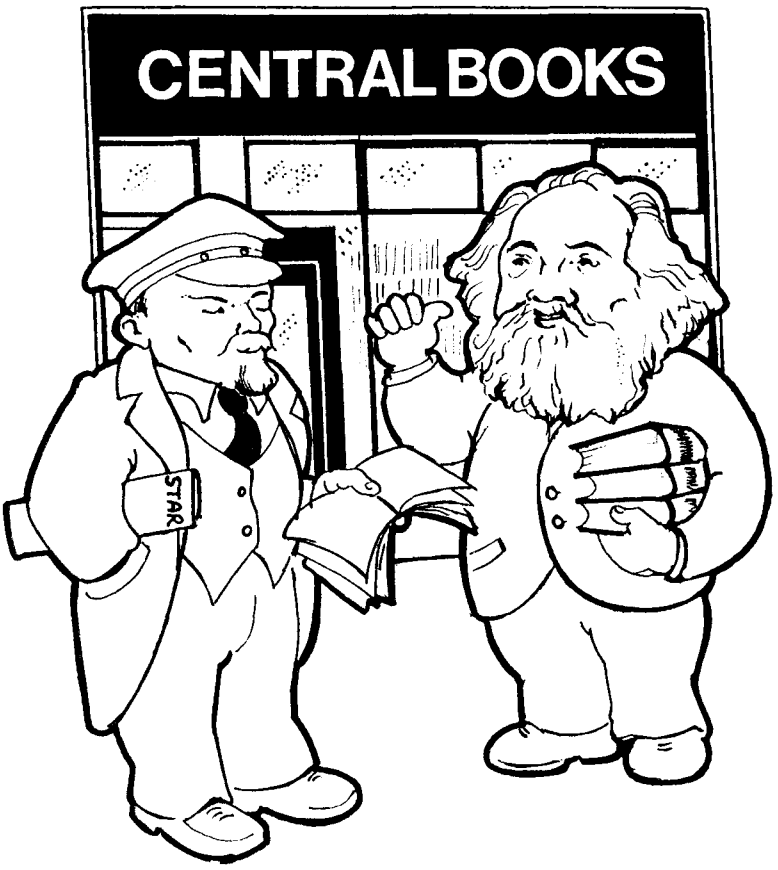
1968 was declared by the UN as the International Year of Human Rights. It must have seemed grotesque to the NLF forces beneath the rain of bombs from a B52, or to those in the political prisons of Greece, Spain, South Africa and much of Latin America.

For British students, it was these events that finally triggered a revolt that had been germinating throughout an entire generation of which they were part. If people in the rest of the world could face the armed might of the United States, they surely could take full part in the drive for change. The entire generation had experienced the fragmentation of the culture that pinned together the fabric of bourgeois normality and all had responded in some measure. But among the young people of the middle strata, these fractures were compound. As a group they had a singular freedom to move in response—a freedom not afforded to working-class young people.

It is no surprise that the movement should have been confused, hedonistic, capable of lucidity and banality at successive moments, that it lacked experience and programme. But it opened the fissures so wide that they are unlikely ever to be closed again. For whatever the considerable recuperative powers of the ruling class, forces and concepts were released that will never again be wholly shackled.

Published by the Communist Party, 16 King Street, London, WC2E 8HY, and printed by Farleigh Press Ltd. (T.U.), Watford, Herts—27285

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



EUROCOMMUNISM AND SOCIALISM Claudin Hbk £4.75

THE ITALIAN COMMUNISTS SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES Sassoon Pbk £2.95

STATE AND CAPITAL: A MARXIST DEBATE Holloway and Picciotto Pbk £3.50

BLACK FIRE: ACCOUNTS OF GUERRILLA WAR IN RHODESIA Raeburn Pbk £2.95

IN THE RAPIDS OF REVOLUTION: Selected writings of John Maclean Pbk £2.95

FOOTBALL HOOLIGANISM: THE WIDER VIEW Ingham, Hall, Clarke, Marsh, Donovan Pbk £1.50

LENIN FOR BEGINNERS Pbk £1.25

GRAMSCI: POLITICAL WRITINGS 1921-1926 Hbk £10.00

POLITICAL ECONOMY OF IMPERIALISM Nabudere Hbk £7.75

MYTH OF MASS CULTURE Swingewood Pbk £2.95

EUROCOMMUNISM AND THE STATE Carrillo Pbk £2.75

BETWEEN TWO CULTURES Watson Pbk £3.95

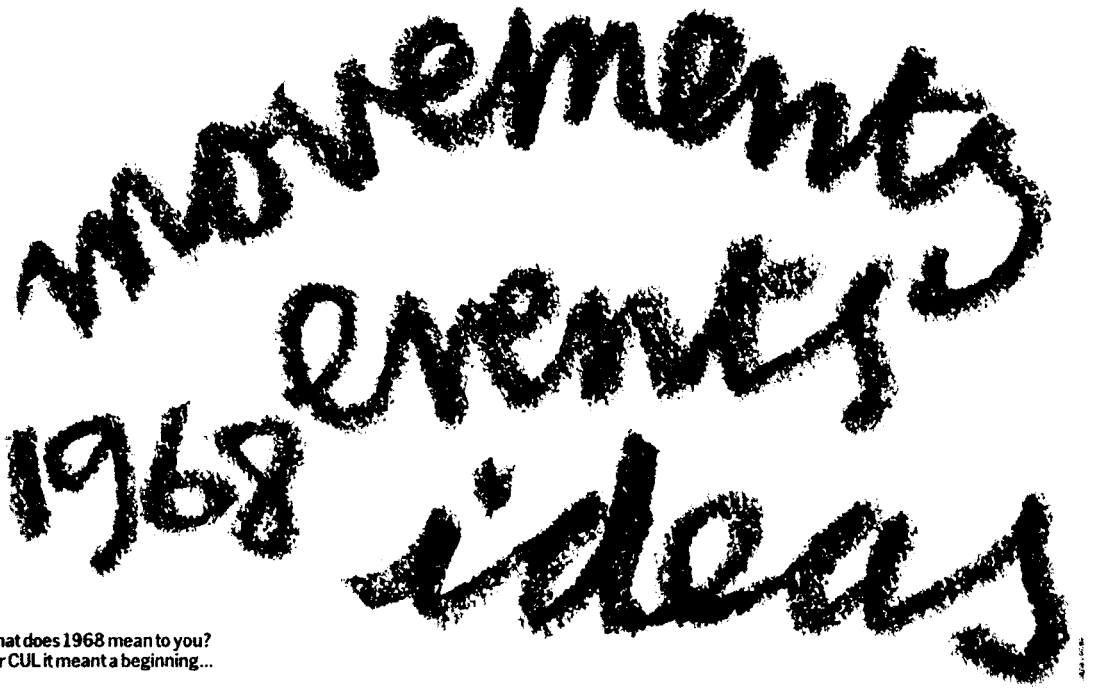
BRECHT ON THEATRE Willet Pbk £3.50

BOLSHEVISM IN ART Middleton Pbk £6.00

Visit our bookshop or order by post (add 15% for postage). Send for our booklists

CENTRAL BOOKS, 37 GRAYS INN ROAD, LONDON WC1. 01-242 6166

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



What does 1968 mean to you?
For CUL it meant a beginning...

10th Communist University of London 1978

July 15-23

Polytechnic of Central London

8 session specialist courses on:

Introduction to Marxism
Art and Design
Britain's Crisis and the Labour Movement
Built Environment
Capitalist State
Economics
Education
Health and Social Care
History
Ideology
Industrial Relations
Law
Literature
Philosophy
Political Science
Psychology
Science and Hegemony
Scientific Method
Social Anthropology
Soviet Studies
Technology and Production
Women's Liberation Movement
Contemporary Marxist Theory

5 session general courses on:

British Labour Movement
British Road to Socialism
British State
China
City Politics
Culture and Ideology
Fascism
Imperialism and the 3rd World
Leftism
National Question
Popular Music
Racism
Sex and Class
Sexuality and Power
Soviet Society
State Monopoly Capitalism
Strategies for Revolution in Western Europe
Student Politics
Theory of the Revolutionary Party
Trade Unionism and Contemporary Capitalism
Youth

One Day Symposium on The Future of Post-School Education with workshops on:

The State
Authoritarianism and Plurality
Marxism
Recurrent Education
Binary System
The Research Question
Industry and Education
Access to Post-School Education
Feminist Perspectives

Evening events will feature Music, Film, Theatre and Political Discussion

Accommodation and Creche available on request

£10 registration fee covers all events and facilities

Prospectus from:
The Organiser
CUL10
16 King Street
London WC2E 8HY

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED